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The Atlantic Monthly

MARCH 2000

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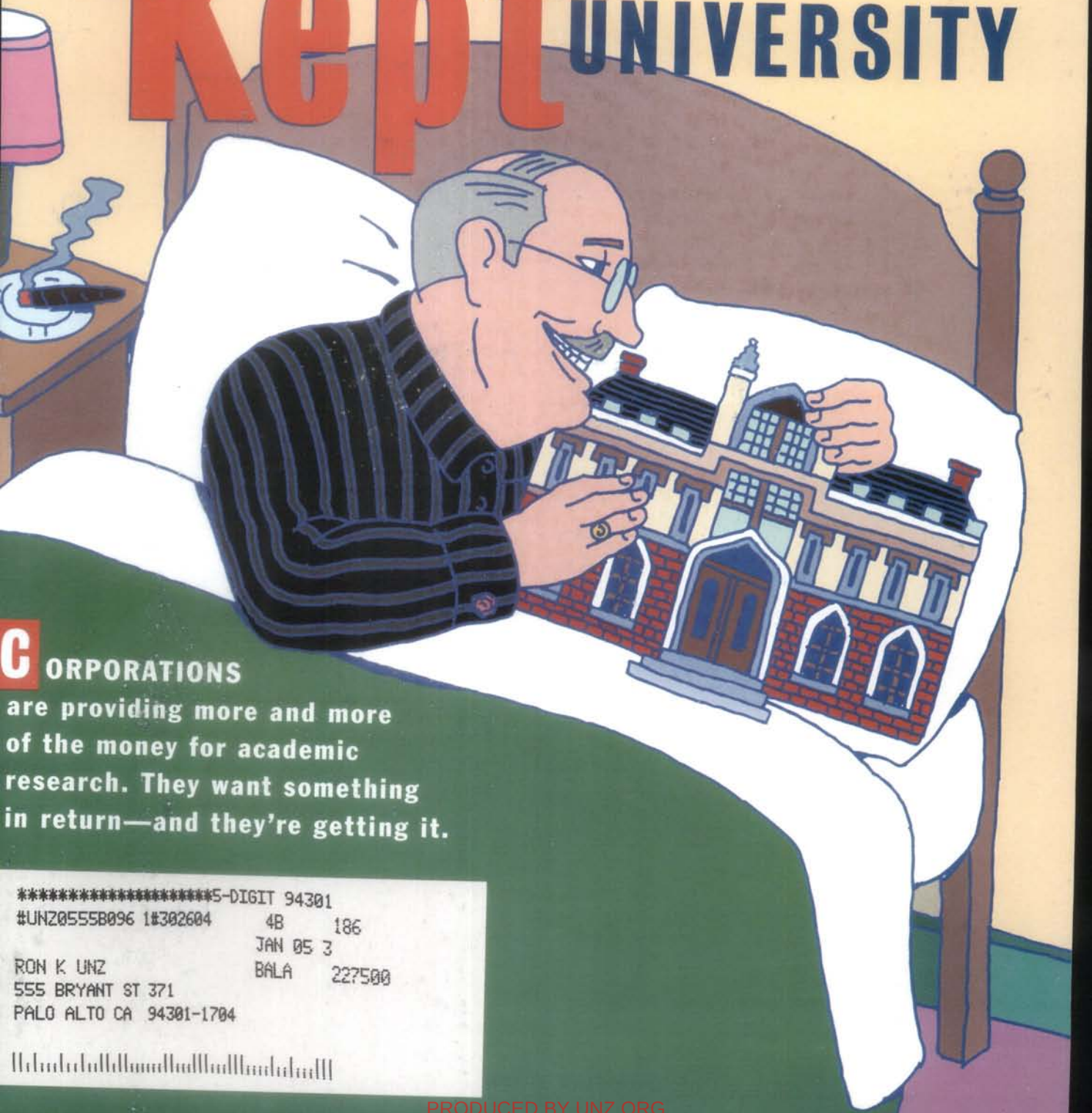

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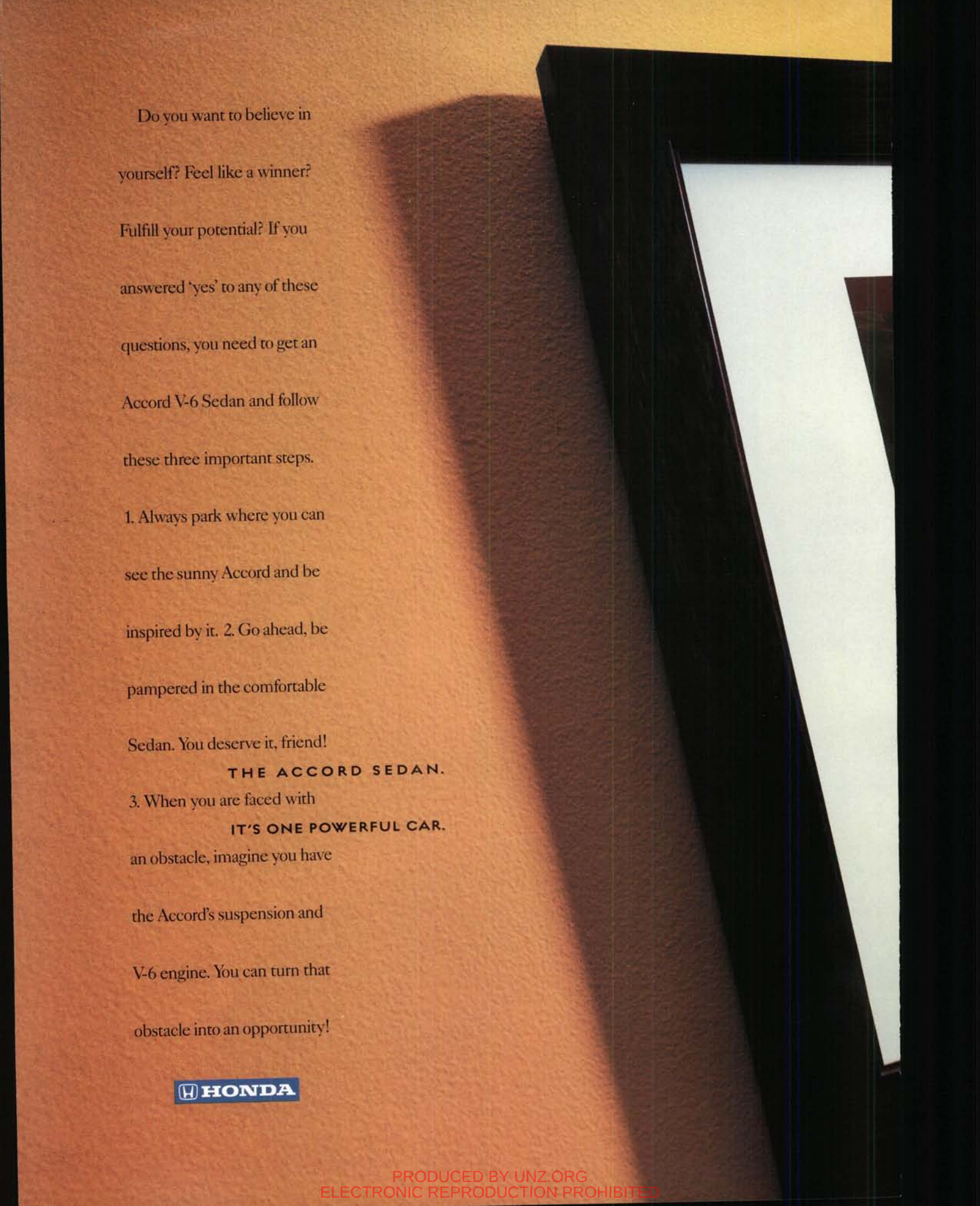

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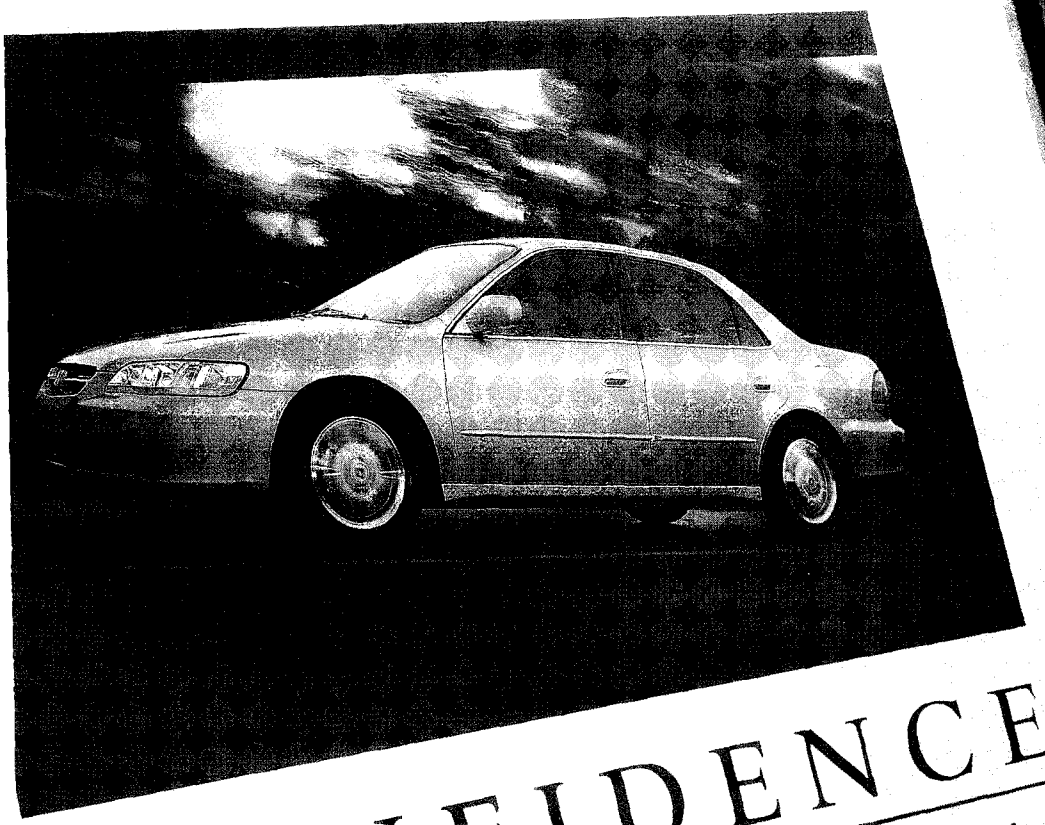

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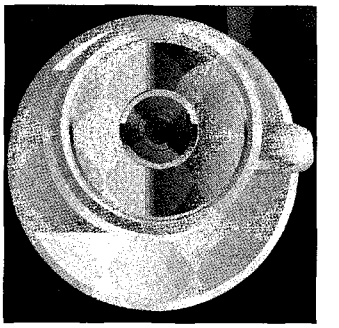

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The Atlantic Monthly (ISSN 0276-9077) is published monthly by The Atlantic Monthly Group, 77 N. Washington St., Boston, MA 02114 (617-854-7700). Periodicals postage paid at Boston, MA, Toronto, Ont., and additional mailing offices. Printed in U.S.A. Advertising and Circulation: 450 W. 33rd St., NY, NY 10001 (212-716-6800). Subscriptions: one year $17.94 in the U.S. and poss.; add $8.00 in Canada, includes GST (123209926); add $15.00 elsewhere. Canada Post Publications Mail Agreement 0261327. Subscription queries: Atlantic Subscription Center, Box 52661, Boulder, CO 80322. Or call 800-234-2411. Back issues: send $7.50 per copy to The Atlantic, Back Issues, 1900 Industrial Park Dr., Federalsburg, MD 21632 (or call 410-754-8219). Vol. 285, No. 3, March 2000. Copyright © 2000, by The Atlantic Monthly Group. All rights reserved. Postmaster: Send address changes to The Atlantic, Box 52661, Boulder, CO 80328.

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THE ownership of *The Atlantic Monthly* has changed nine times in the magazine's 143-year history. The editorship has changed ten times. Now both have changed again. David G. Bradley, the new owner, is the founder and chairman of the Advisory Board Company, a for-profit research firm in Washington, D.C. He is also the chairman of the National Journal Group, which publishes *National Journal*, a weekly magazine devoted to politics and government. Bradley named Michael Kelly, who has worked as a reporter or editor at *The New York Times*, *The New Yorker*, and *National Journal*, as *The Atlantic*'s new editor in chief.

The February issue was the final one to be edited by William Whitworth—his 227th. Bill Whitworth would be the last person to offer an assessment of his nineteen years at *The Atlantic*. He has always insisted that the magazine speak for itself. His byline has never appeared in these pages. But Whitworth commissioned every article in the magazine, approved every short story and poem, scrutinized every sentence and line. His serene manner and soft drawl could not conceal his deep passions: for original thinking and brilliant writing, for humor, for the basic—and the subtle—rules of the English language. His penciled comments on galley proofs, in a precise hand, were legendary for their authority and economy. A circled word accompanied by a tiny "*must* we?" in the margin might as well have been a traffic barrier with flashing lights. In an age of excessive encomiums, Whitworth on rare occasions bestowed a "good piece" at the end of a proof. Some writers had the words framed.

Bill Whitworth was born and raised in Arkansas. His first job in journalism was as a general-assignment reporter for the *Arkansas Gazette*. He came north in 1963, to the *New York Herald Tribune*, and in 1966 he joined the staff of William Shawn's *New Yorker*, first as a writer and then as an editor. During Whitworth's tenure at *The Atlantic* the magazine won nine National Magazine Awards. Whitworth also brought to the magazine a particular interest in graphic design, and under his editorship *The Atlantic* was noted for its visual content, earning hundreds of awards for illustration. Neither of these yardsticks would be chosen by Whitworth's writers and colleagues to take his essential measure. He simply embodies the high standards to which those around him aspire.

Every new *Atlantic* editor has brought new ideas and emphases. Every editor has also upheld a view of the magazine once expressed by the eighth editor, Ellery Sedgwick. *The Atlantic*, he wrote, "should face the whole of life, its riddles, its adventures; the critical questions of the day, the problems of the human heart." It faces them still. —THE EDITORS

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J. Bottum ("The Soundtracking of America") is the books and arts editor of *The Weekly Standard* and the poetry editor of *First Things*. His work has appeared in *National Review*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *Commentary*.

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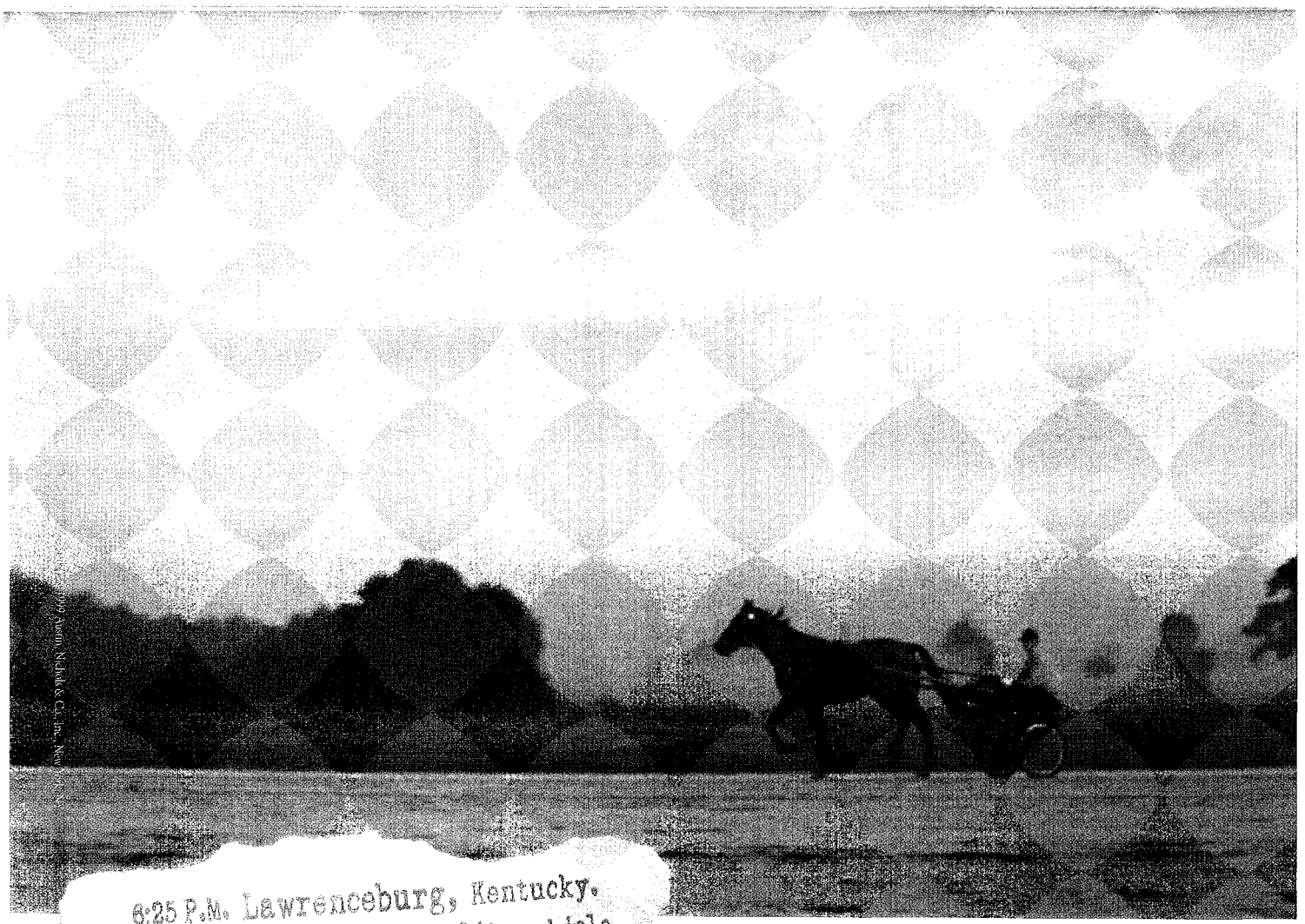

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LETTERS

On the Rez

I commend Ian Frazier ("On the Rez," December *Atlantic*) for telling the story of SuAnne Big Crow. We all need heroes who lift us up by showing us what we can be.

But Frazier's statement "If the Iroquois hadn't resisted the French in the 1600s, the Northeast would be speaking French today; if the Comanche hadn't opposed the Spanish, the American Southwest would now be Mexico" is truly absurd. The French alienated the Iroquois, who became Britain's most important Indian allies. Their control of the Mohawk Valley was an important bulwark against French incursion, but that is it. They did not block the Lake Champlain route that the French used to threaten Massachusetts Colony; and a century later, fighting with the British against the American Colonists, they failed to take Fort Stanwix, much less Boston. In the 1600s the French did inspire raids like the one on Deerfield, but they lacked the resources and the Iroquois lacked the will to form an army that could have overrun New England.

The statement about the Comanche is even more absurd. Like the Apache and the Ute, the Comanche were formidable enemies of Spain. However, every bit of Comanche land passed from Spain to Mexico. The Mexicans lost it in the Texas Revolt and the Mexican War. Both the Iroquois and the Comanche fought heroically for their land and culture, but their struggles in no way produced the results Frazier attributes to them.

Frazier says, "I want to be an uncaught Indian like them," citing Powhatan, Joseph Brant, Red Cloud, and Sitting Bull. But these men were well grounded in their culture and expressed nationalistic preferences to remain so. His fundamental error is the statement "Indians were the original 'free'; early America was European culture reset in an Indian frame." The Indians were never "free" in that way. Like other tribal peoples, they remained bound to their clan, strictly observing the folkways of their ancestors. This precluded the development of a common language and fostered bitter tribal rivalry that made each tribe a neat bite for European expansion. (In our headlong quest for "diversity" we should remember what the lack of a common language cost the Indians.)

The individual freedom we cherish has everything to do with America but almost nothing to do with "the Indian." In 1517, not thirty years after Columbus discovered the New World, Martin Luther challenged the Catholic Church's control over men's souls. By 1776 this challenge had produced a philosophy of the individual naturally free from and equal to all other individuals. This philosophy was European, but Europe had no place for it to take root in the real world.

For several reasons it took root in Britain's American Colonies. First and foremost, the Colonies were distant from the British Crown, and by granting a charter to the first Colonies the King limited his power over them. From Jamestown and Plymouth to the closing of the frontier "the West" has been a place where government was distant and limited. As such, it has always been identified with freedom by whites. In colonial Britain owning land was the criterion for political rights. Cheap land in America transformed its society without changing the premise on which that society was based, simply by vastly increasing the percentage of landowners.

On the frontier, however, a rough egalitarian meritocracy evolved. Here men lived by their abilities or they did not live. For nearly three centuries European Americans went west in search of wealth and freedom. Although the Indians from Squanto onward facilitated the white man's move west, white men did not move west to become Indians. They moved west to practice the freedom promised by their own culture but denied to them because they lacked the wealth to claim it in the East. Thus Frazier's "freedom" belongs not to the Indian whose culture bound him as securely as any European serf but to the white and sometimes black mav-

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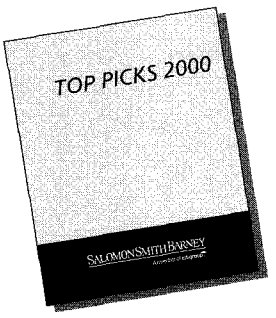

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ericks who slipped their bonds to live as they chose just beyond the reach of government.

After the frontier closed, Hollywood kept its spirit of inclusive egalitarianism alive long enough for America to complete the long uphill passage from the Charters of Jamestown and Plymouth to the 1964 Civil Rights Act. That act finally made law of the ideal. "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal . . . " However, that achievement may not stand. The Oglala nationalism evident in Frazier's writing is a troubling indication that those who most need opportunity no longer believe in America as a place where anyone can make it because individual will and skill trump all the arbitrary factors of race, birth, religion, and so forth. "The Rez" is about the size of Kosovo, so who is to say that America can't be balkanized if people no longer believe that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts?

Harry E. Beemer
Camden, Ark.

No one with a shred of common sense, education, and ability to think logically can possibly avoid seeing Indian reservations for what they really are: internment camps for an overrun enemy. Part of our sad history as a country is that as we grew and prospered, we perpetrated atrocities on the native peoples of what is now Mexico and the United States. (Of course, our national immigration policy, our southern border, and the NAFTA-inspired "back flow" of the work-seeking peoples of Mexico are threatening a de facto repossession of vast tracts of the southwestern and southeastern United States.)

The solution to the "Indian problem" is not more reservations but fewer, along with the abolition of the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Such institutions have a vested interest in maintaining the politically correct balkanization of American culture and people. People of Indian extraction will share in our national prosperity only by becoming a part of American culture and working the system to their personal advantage, as other people of color have done. What they worship or smoke, or how they dress at home, is their business; they'll never succeed, though, if they insist on trying to change the mainstream American culture of the twenty-first century with militant insistence on public (that is, school, government, and workplace) accommodations and displays of eccentric or illegal ethnocentric behaviors not shared or valued by the majority of the American population. Reservations are not the way to achieve this, nor are other government-sanctioned "separate but equal" programs; they are doomed to failure absent a complete, naturally evolved (not government- or media-enforced) change in mainstream American culture and its accepted mores.

Allan Hull
Marietta, Ga.

What a beautiful, inspiring, wonderfully brave act SuAnne Big Crow performed. She is truly an American hero.

F. F. Nakovic
El Paso, Texas

The great Jewish fear in the Holocaust was that the Jewish people would be "vanished." Somehow the Oglala Sioux survive; Frazier helps me understand how. Not many magazines want to help us know these things.

Dick Vittitow
Santa Cruz, Calif.

Ian Frazier replies:

The fierceness of Iroquois resistance prevented the French from expanding their influence southward in the early days of New France, just as the Comanche interfered with the northward expansion of New Spain. Had those two European powers been able to establish themselves more securely and deeply in North America, history might have turned out quite differently. As for Harry Beemer's claim that the Indian's culture "bound him as securely as any European serf," we are of course all bound by our culture. In fact, from a European point of view, Indians made very unsatisfactory serfs, as would-be masters kept finding out to their frustration. To many freedom-loving people, Indians seemed less bound by place, occupation, hierarchy, and material obligations than most Europeans were. The idea of Native American freedom was certainly an important part of the allure of this continent in Europeans' eyes, as many writings of the frontier era make clear.

Allan Hull's letter speaks in the age-old voice of termination and assimilation, policies that have never worked half as well as the confidence in the voice seems to promise. Neither the government nor the media made America into a diverse

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place—it just is one, as it was when only Indians lived here, as it was when almost all its believing white people were Protestants of innumerable denominations and sects. America has survived and prospered as a diverse nation, and we should not take out our unjustified fears of balkanization on Indian tribes.

Divided We Sprawl

After reading Bruce Katz and Jennifer Bradley's "Divided We Sprawl" (December *Atlantic*) it occurred to me that if Al Gore and the authors of this article have their way, it could be the end of the American Dream: the average American family could no longer aspire to a nice single-family house on a decent-sized lot in a safe neighborhood. Such a thing would be available only to the well-off. My parents live in a nice house on a nice lot in the suburbs. My wife and I have built three new houses at the edge of the built-up areas of the suburbs, but my children and grandchildren may not be allowed to do the same. Instead they may have to settle for a small townhouse or apartment in a congested area. Within built-up communities that are desirable and safe, land is very expensive, so only the well-off can afford a house, even on a small lot. Restricting expansion into undeveloped land at the edge of the suburbs would drive up the cost of desirable buildable land and of existing houses in established areas. Although Bruce Katz and Jennifer Bradley may prefer living in a small apartment near public transportation and other urban amenities, most Americans would rather have their own houses, even if it means putting up with the problems of suburban sprawl.

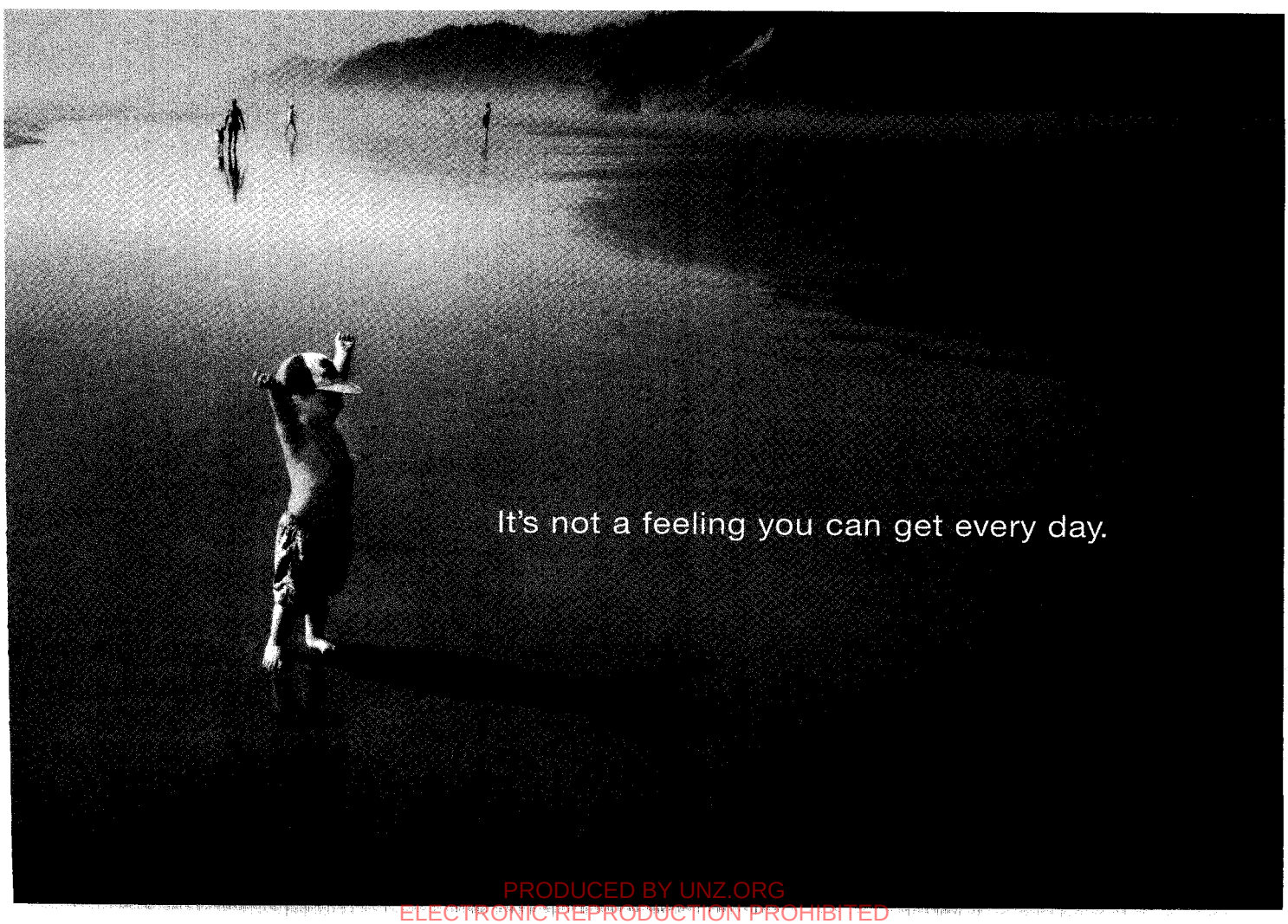
Floyd Dunn
Downers Grove, Ill.

Bruce Katz and Jennifer Bradley reply:

Floyd Dunn's response represents a common caricature of metropolitan thinking. Doubtless other people share these views and believe that they themselves benefit, on balance, from sprawl. Yet that is in part because they're not paying the full cost of growth and are generally able to distance themselves from the burdens of poverty and distress in other communities. Metropolitanism is about leveling the playing field between older communities, where we have billions of dollars in public and private investment (and major social challenges), and those communities that are springing up overnight on the suburban fringe. In addition, metropolitanism is not about substituting high-rise apartments in urban neighborhoods for free-standing homes on suburban lots. That is a false choice that ignores the substantial amount of vacant land that still exists in most metropolitan areas and that can accommodate the building of new single-family homes (as well as other housing) for decades to come.

Health-Care Economy

Let us assume, hypothetically, that Charles Morris ("The Health-Care Economy Is Nothing to Fear," December *Atlantic*) is correct and that the national economy could afford to have 25 percent of our gross domestic product go to health care. America still faces a series of agonizing health-related issues.



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Consider: The same dynamics that take health care to 25 percent of our GDP are likely to take it to 30 percent and continue on up. Health-care costs have grown at an average of more than twice the rate of inflation for the past thirty-five years, and such a rate is obviously unsustainable. Sooner or later we must recognize that health care in a technological, aging society has the power to absorb our entire GDP unless we realistically confront what we can afford and what we can't afford. We need to start that dialogue now.

Consider: Twenty-five percent of the GDP would be likely to give us a Taj Mahal medical system surrounded by inadequate roads, infrastructure, schools, parks, and so on. Eighty percent of U.S. health care is paid for by third-party payers (government or insurance), and any system that allows us to explore our real and imaginary diseases without economic pain is unsustainable. Americans clearly want more health care as consumers than they are willing to pay for as taxpayers. Health care cannot be allowed to crowd out all the other needs of a modern society.

Consider: From all we know about the health of societies, health care is not the best way to buy health for a country. Health care and health are not synonymous. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services points out that of the thirty years of life expectancy we added in the past century, only five were due to allopathic medicine. Historically the great enemy of death and disease has been public health, not medicine. This continues to be true: the biggest threats to our national health today are smoking, drugs, alcohol, bad habits, and bad lifestyles, not inadequate health-care funding.

Consider: Taxpayers currently fund approximately 50 percent of U.S. health care, for the elderly, the disabled, and people on welfare. Spending 25 percent of the GDP on health care would dramatically and unacceptably raise taxes and transfer payments. Under present funding patterns 25 percent would dramatically increase taxes on the young for the benefit of the elderly. We are living longer and having fewer children and must ask, Is it wise to socialize the costs of growing old and charge today's workers, many of whom have no or inadequate health insurance themselves?

Consider: Health-care spending does not exist in a vacuum but competes with other important needs of an aging society, such as income security, long-term care, meals on wheels, respite care, and senior-citizen centers. Most of us would rather buy a decent quality of life than buy the last bit of biological life.

Do we really want to almost double the funding of a system whose important health indicators have fallen further behind those of other developed nations? Study after study has suggested that we have too many specialists, too many hospital beds, too much duplication and redundancy in medical technology, and too much defensive medicine. Our doctors earn a far greater multiple of the average per capita income than doctors in any other country, and to our shame we leave 44 million Americans without health insurance. Polls show that for all our medical miracles, no other developed country would trade its health-care system for ours. George Scheiber, an international expert, has observed, "In comparison with other major industrial countries, health care in the United States costs more per person and per unit of service, is less accessible to a larger portion of its citizens, is provided at a more intensive level and offers comparatively poor gross outcomes."

Charles Morris is articulate and thoughtful, but his arguments only reinforce the status quo in U.S. health care and delay consideration of the hard issues that this nation faces. How do we cover those 44 million Americans for basic health care? Do we really want to give our present system another 11 percent of GDP? What should we pay for collectively and what individually? From a public-policy perspective, America's health-care system is technically brilliant but socially inadequate. America denies more health care to more people than any other developed country. Our aging bodies have the potential to bankrupt our children and grandchildren. We can do a lot but not everything. We face, inevitably, a series of Hobson's choices as we retire the Baby Boomers. The sooner we face those choices the better.

Richard D. Lamm
Director, Center for Public Policy & Contemporary Issues
Denver, Colo.

Increased health-care spending provides a better quality of life for some people. (Just ask my post-operative cataract patients.) However, high levels of spending have failed to affect high urban infant-mortality rates and have not changed overall life expectancy. "Evidence-based medicine" at Group Health of Puget Sound and other closed-panel HMOs is the exception. In fact half the heart-attack patients leaving a "high-quality" (high-cost) cardiac-care unit do not get the beta-blockers that are known to prevent second heart attacks. How does more spending solve a problem like this? Charles Morris advocates a "health-care-based economy," with a shift "toward the public and nonprofit sectors" that could consume 25 percent of GDP. He proposes funding this change by having people "retiring later, working harder, liquidating assets, and borrowing against their houses" and with "steeper payroll taxes." It is simple economics and accounting: using taxes and liquidated assets to fund this health-topia requires that spending decrease in other areas. Should we spend less on schools, environmental cleanup, or magazine subscriptions?

Currently, efficiencies in health care rarely result in lower costs to consumers. Hospitals dominate most markets and are able to avoid price competition. I propose that the health-care sector, instead of taking a growing share of GDP, increase productivity by adopting efficiencies and market mechanisms found in other parts of the economy.

Stephen E. Kraft, M.D.
St. Louis, Mo.

I am appalled that someone claiming to write an authoritative article on health care in the United States can ignore the basic immoral fact that 44.3 million Americans have no health insurance at all—in effect are rationed out of the health-care system. Everyone in Canada has access to health care, everyone in the United Kingdom has access to health care, everyone in Japan has access to health care—and the list goes on.

In 1998 the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development assembled a list of those countries that make 100 percent of their populations eligible for government-provided office and hospital coverage: Australia, Canada, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Korea, Luxembourg, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. Countries providing coverage to more than 90 percent of the population include Austria (99 percent), Belgium (99 percent), France (99.5 percent), Germany (92.2 percent), Hungary (99 percent), and Spain (99.8 percent).

Morris is sanguine about the escalating

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health costs in the United States, saying that we can well afford them. Did he consult with businessmen alarmed over the rising costs of providing health insurance to their employees? Does he have some special insight into the political views of Congress, which has voted down all suggestions for universal health care since the days of Teddy Roosevelt? Professor Uwe Reinhardt has repeatedly pointed out that Americans already pay the total cost of the health-care system. It is not a "tax" but a distributed financial burden that ultimately falls on the public, and the public does not seem willing to tax itself further for the benefit of the large uninsured population in this country.

In response to the Commerce Department's assertion that "the United States could save about 4 percent of GDP" through health reform, the economist Sherry Glied asks, "What do they want us to spend it *on*?" The answer, of course, is universal access to health care.

Orville C. Green III, M.D.
Emeritus Professor of Pediatrics
Northwestern University Medical School
Wilmette, Ill.

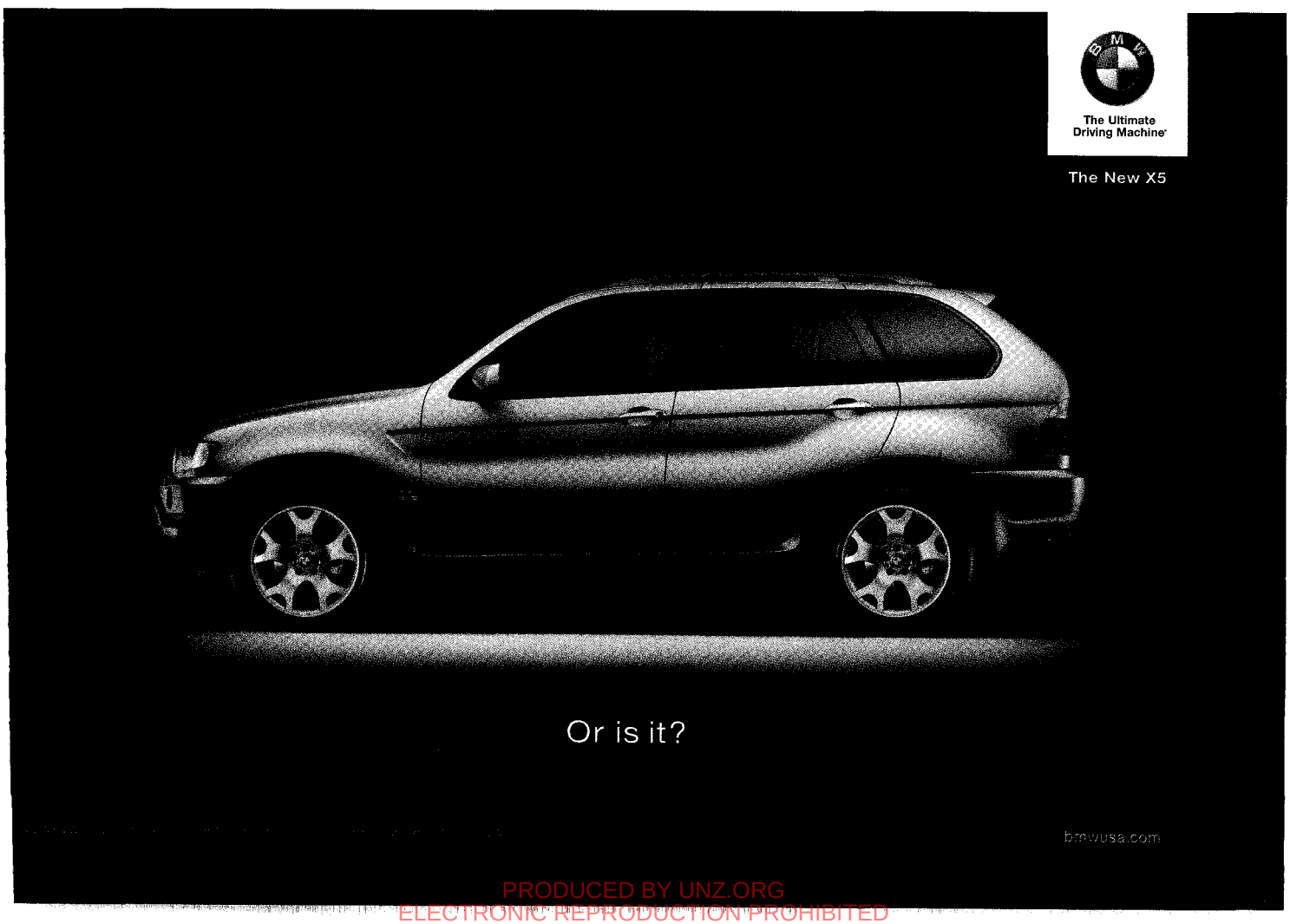
Thank you for the timely and stimulating article "The Health-Care Economy Is Nothing to Fear." Charles Morris made a compelling case for medical technology but pointed out that technological innovation may increase the demand for a service faster than it reduces cost per service. When this happens, the total cost for that service increases. I wish to add, however, that technological innovation may also reduce costs for a service faster than it increases demand for a service. When this happens, the total cost for that service decreases. As competition among medical service providers increases, technology innovation by computer engineers will eventually reduce the total health-care bill for our nation.

I also wish to take issue with the argument that escalating health-care costs are not to be feared. As Paul Kennedy's analysis of escalating military spending in *The Rise and Fall of Great Powers* suggests, when spending grows in one area of the economy, it usually leads to diminished savings and restricted economic growth. For example, food, housing, and medical services each account for about 15 percent of GDP. If Americans were willing to reduce spending on housing and food by a third, health-care costs would reach 25 percent of GDP without any economic impact. How many owners of $300,000 homes would be willing to move into $200,000 homes? How many households would be willing to reduce their $600-a-month grocery bills by $200 a month? My guess is not very many. Most would tap into their savings rather than reduce their standard of living.

James E. Gover
Kettering University
Flint, Mich.

Charles R. Morris replies:

Richard Lamm assumes that I am correct that we can afford to have 25 percent of GDP go to health care, but he then proceeds to argue that this will impoverish us. Back in the 1960s economists said it would be "intolerable" for health care to consume more than 10 percent of GDP. But changes on this scale happen all the time over twenty-year periods. Who twenty years ago would have predicted the enormous sector of the economy devoted



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to personal computers and video games? And why blame health care, rather than, say, the taste for huge, very expensive, gas-guzzling new cars, for deficiencies in highways and parks? He ends with a cry that "we" should stop the health-care juggernaut. But that train has left the station. The sooner experienced, thoughtful policy analysts like Mr. Lamm face up to it, the better.

Stephen Kraft suggests in his letter that I "advocate" a system of health care that consumes 25 percent of GDP. Not true. I simply forecast it. If spending were rising because of price gouging, it would be a relatively easy problem to fix. Instead prices are probably *falling*, but spending is going up because new technology is creating many more useful health-care interventions that people want. That fact, coupled with Boomer aging, imparts an irresistible momentum to the continued expansion of the health-care sector. If nothing else, it underlines the importance of expanding the reach of government-supported insurance programs.

I'm afraid that Orville Green read the article he wanted to read, not the one I wrote. He is "appalled" that I ignored the large numbers of uninsured Americans. In fact I said that problem is "scandalous." And he takes Sherry Glied's quote wrenchingly out of context. She is a strong advocate of universal health-care insurance, and was arguing that health-care spending is at least as productive as buying imported video gadgets. As I suggested in the article, the rising standard of basic health care will force the expansion of redistributive, government-subsidized insurance programs, as more and more working families and their employers become unable to pay for insurance on their own. Congress, in fact, has been increasing taxes to pay for health care for more than thirty years, although protesting all the time.

James Gover is surely right that technology will occasionally reduce health-care outlays (note the disappearance of major stomach surgery for ulcers), but in most industries lower costs and better outcomes typically expand markets and increase spending. The economics of hip replacements and personal computers are much the same. And it's just not true that growth in health-care spending will mean cutting back on housing and other consumption goods. If Professor Gover does the math, he'll see that even with economic growth of only one percent or so for the next two decades, health care can grow to 20–25 percent of GDP and the rest of the economy will *still* grow. There's no plausible scenario that says that as a nation we will have to cut back on other necessities to afford more health care; we just can't increase our spending on other items as fast.

Phony Science Wars

In his review of Ian Hacking's *The Social Construction of What?* ("Phony Science Wars, November *Atlantic*), Richard Rorty challenges the orthodox scientific view that "reality has an intrinsic structure that science accurately describes" and defends the alternative view put forward by Thomas Kuhn in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*: "Science might have done as good a job if it had never come up with either quarks or genes. . . . In this view, scientific theories are tools that do a job. They do it well, but some other tools might perhaps have done the same job equally well." Rorty writes that scientists find this view absurd (Hacking, he says, is "dubious" about it), but doesn't explain why—nor does Hacking in *The Social Construction of What?* Let me try to do so.

The reasons have to do with the structure of scientific theories and the way they relate to experience. To understand them we don't need to consider anything as recondite as quarks. Euclid's (and Newton's) theory of physical space, Euclidean geometry, will do just as well. Near the end of the nineteenth century it became clear that Euclidean geometry, considered as a theory of physical space, has two distinct parts: a formal part, which is independent of both experience and any natural language; and an interpretation, which connects the formal part to experience. The formal part consists of abstract geometric definitions, theorems, and proofs, together with abstract logical rules and definitions. In this formal part terms such as "point," "line," and "between"—and even logical terms, like "and," "or," and "not"—have no assigned meanings. They do have definitions, but these are not like ordinary dictionary definitions. They tell us not what the terms mean but rather how we are allowed to use them. The intuitive meanings are just mnemonic devices—concessions to the fact that human brains did not evolve to deal with abstract structures.

The interpretive part of the theory tells a carpenter or a surveyor how to use and test the formal structure—what, concretely, is meant by such terms as "triangle," "angle," "right angle," "two," and "sum"—and how to translate formal theorems, represented by meaningless strings of symbols, into testable statements. Unlike the formal part, the interpretive part relies on a natural language. But any natural language will do. And nothing of scientific importance is lost in translation from one natural language into another.

Even today Euclidean geometry fits the experience of carpenters and surveyors perfectly. Until well into the twentieth century it also fit the experience of astronomers perfectly. However, Einstein's theory of physical spacetime makes predictions that differ very slightly from those of Euclidean geometry, and delicate astronomical observations from 1919 onward have shown that deviations from the predictions of Newton's theory do indeed exist and are identical with those predicted by Einstein's theory.

Now we come to a key part of the argument: Although the formal part of Einstein's theory differs profoundly from the formal part of Newton's theory, it nevertheless *contains* it as a limiting case, approximately valid under specific conditions (like those of interest to carpenters and surveyors). Thus Einstein's theory did not *displace* Newton's; it swallowed it whole.

Is Einstein's theory the final word? Most physicists think not. But they expect that the formal part of any theory that supersedes Einstein's will contain the formal part of Einstein's theory as a limiting case, approximately valid under specific conditions. It will not displace but swallow Einstein's theory. Even so, physicists do not expect the new theory to *resemble* Einstein's theory, any more than Einstein's theory resembled Newton's.

These remarks apply to other physical theories—and, indeed, to the whole tightly interwoven theoretical fabric of natural science. When a strongly confirmed theory like Newton's is displaced by an even more strongly confirmed theory like Einstein's, the old theory lives on as a limiting case of the new theory. The domain of the new theory always includes that of the old theory (Einstein's theory, like Newton's, applies to bounded physical systems like stars and galaxies, but unlike Newton's theory, it also applies to an unbounded system, the universe), even when the two the-

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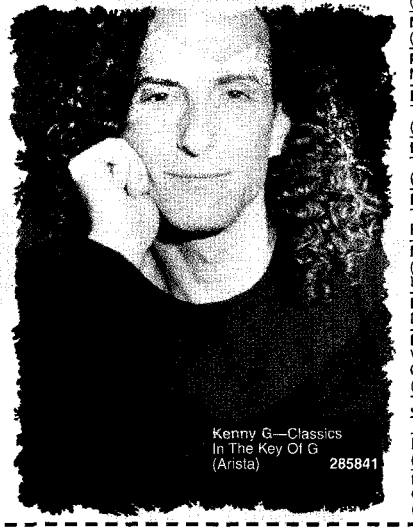

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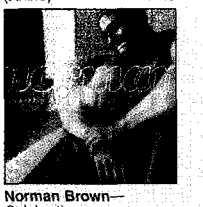

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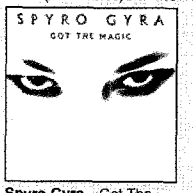

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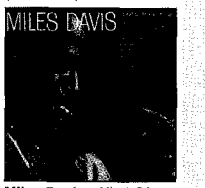

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ories are radically different; and the new theory is always at least as accurate as the old theory within their common domain. There seems to be no *logical* reason why these historical generalizations should hold, but from the time of Archimedes to the present they always have. Moreover, as scientific theories have laid claim to broader and broader domains, they have also become increasingly unified. Maxwell's theory of electromagnetism united previously separate theories of electricity, magnetism, and light (and in the process predicted a new phenomenon: radio waves); quantum physics united physics/chemistry and biology. Again, there seems to be no logical reason why scientific theories should repeatedly merge in this way. (Elsewhere—in philosophy, for example—splitting is the rule.) Unless . . . unless successive versions of the formal part of natural science—the part that is independent of natural language and hence of human culture—are progressively less incomplete views of an ultimate formal structure. This suggestion is, of course, an unprovable speculation; but it accounts for otherwise unexplained scientific and historical facts in a simple and natural way. Until Richard Rorty can give us some idea of what theories that dispense with quarks and genes (but account equally well for the experimental evidence that led scientists to posit them) might be like, it will continue to seem more plausible than the alternative option that "science might have done as good a job if it had never come up with either quarks or genes."

David Layzer
Donald H. Menzel
Research Professor of Astrophysics
Harvard University
Cambridge, Mass.

Richard Rorty replies:

David Layzer's letter lucidly outlines the position that philosophers of science call realism—a position centering on the claim that successive scientific theories provide "progressively less incomplete views of an ultimate formal structure." Thomas Kuhn and other critics of realism regard the idea that science is gradually closing in on what is really out there as an unhelpful metaphor—intuitively attractive, picturesque, but non-explanatory. The debate between those who share Kuhn's dismissive attitude toward realism and those who think that the realist's "unprovable speculation" (to use Layzer's words) is essential to science's self-image is central to contemporary philosophy of science.

Advice & Consent

Re Leonard J. Leff's excellent piece "*Gone With the Wind* and Hollywood's Racial Politics" (December *Atlantic*):

In 1979, forty years after the movie opened, the TV producer George Schlatter staged a sort of second edition of his hugely successful *Laugh-In*, featuring thirteen quite unknown young comedy actors. One memorable skit was a bit from *Gone With the Wind*. A worried and distracted Scarlett was pacing up and down in Tara's ornate living room, wringing her hands as she waited for Rhett Butler to make an appearance. Finally his booming voice could be heard just offstage: "Scarlett!" She clasped her hands together and cried, "Rhett, my darling!" And in strode the manly, handsome Rhett Butler—who was black. The part was being played by a fine young comedian named Ben Powers.

As a publicist of some twenty-five years in Hollywood, I have rarely heard a studio audience crack up the way this one did. David Selznick would have given a huge sigh of relief.

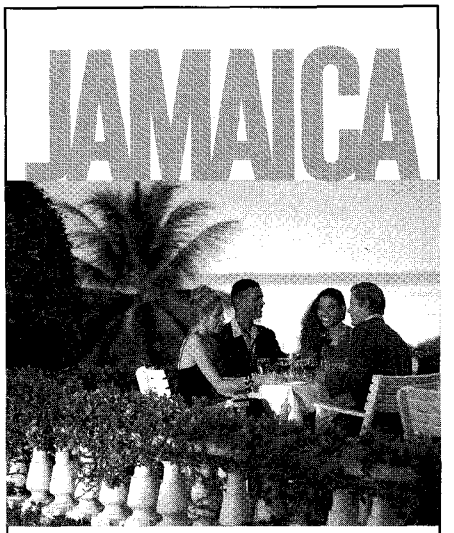
Daniel A. Jenkins
Louisville, Ken.

Two of the letters in the January *Atlantic* in response to "The Mystique of Betty Friedan," by Alan Wolfe (September *Atlantic*), were thoughtful critiques supporting Friedan's work. The third gave exposure to the seventeen-year-old grudge of someone whose hand didn't get shaken at a speaking engagement. The circumstances showed the airport-to-podium schedule to have been very tight. Untold thousands must have been similarly "snubbed" when Jesus, Gandhi, and Martin Luther King Jr. brushed past. (Jesus might have humbled the self-important department chair on purpose!)

Daphne Dunn Wilson
Sebastopol, Calif.

Editors' Note

A photograph on page 70 of the January, 2000, issue was incorrectly captioned, because of an error by the photostock agency. The rabbi shown in the picture is Rabbi Mordechai Eliyahu.



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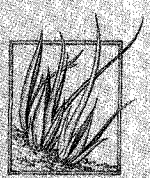

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THE MARCH ALMANAC

Q & A

Why does it always seem to rain on the weekend, rather than during the workweek?

A 1998 study by climatologists at Arizona State University suggests that this is more than just a matter of perception. Precipitation levels on the East Coast, they found, are 22 percent higher on Saturdays than on Mondays. Evidently the culprit is not Murphy's Law but the pollution produced in big cities. Factories and commuters' cars begin spewing out carbon monoxide each Monday, and emissions build throughout the week; by Saturday, emissions levels are often high enough to trigger the formation of rain clouds. After a low-pollution weekend the cycle begins anew. Something to take comfort from on yet another rainy Saturday: high pollution levels may diminish the potential force of hurricanes. Hot air trapped by the pollution causes more rain to fall along a hurricane's edges; this in turn weakens the storm's center.

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Arts & Letters

More than 200 objects from Istanbul's Topkapi Palace—the political and cultural center of the Ottoman Empire—go on exhibit this month at the Corcoran Gallery of Art, in Washington, D.C. The Topkapi was home to the empire's sultans from the 15th century through the 19th, and at any given point employed hundreds of artisans. A number of the objects in the exhibit have never before left the palace; some are the oldest pieces of Ottoman art ever to leave Turkey. Among the items on display are the well-nicked battle sword of Sultan Mehmed II (ruler from 1444–1446 and 1451–1481); the ebony-and-ivory throne of Sultan Süleyman I (1520–1566); the Topkapi dagger, showcased in the 1964 film *Topkapi*; and a variety of illuminated manuscripts. Also included are objects from outside the Ottoman Empire, acquired through its far-flung trade; these range from English clocks to the most extensive collection of Chinese porcelain anywhere but China. The show will close in Washington in June, and will travel to San Diego and Fort Lauderdale.

Government

This is the last month in which pets coming into Great Britain from most Western European countries will face a six-month quarantine. In the future animals with "pet passports" documenting effective rabies vaccinations, among other things, will be granted immediate entry. This is one of several phases in ending Britain's 100-year-old quarantine rule, the toughest in the world. The quarantine rule has attracted vehement protest over the years and inspired some unusual measures: in the 1960s Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton housed their four dogs on a yacht moored in the Thames, in order to avoid being separated from them. Also this month primaries or caucuses occur in 31 states. The nominees may be apparent after March **7**, when both parties hold contests in California, Georgia, Maryland, Missouri, New York, Ohio, Washington, and five New England states (whose contests make up the Yankee Primary), and Democrats hold caucuses in Hawaii, Idaho, and North Dakota.

Demographics

March is the peak month for indoor tanning, according to an industry survey of tanning salons. Students preparing for April proms or spring-break beach vacations and travelers preparing for resort visits account for the spike in business. It is estimated that more than 28 million Americans tan indoors each year, and that more than a million of them make daily visits, in spite of the widely publicized, and increasing, health risks of exposure to ultraviolet light (the typical American now has a one in 79 chance of developing malignant melanoma sometime during his or her life). Some tanning salons have added non-UV light-therapy rooms, which expose the eyes to high-intensity artificial light but do not promote tanning, in a bid to build a clientele among sufferers of seasonal affective disorder, a depressive condition caused by the low levels of daylight from October through March. Those using the herbal remedy St. John's wort to alleviate winter depression should avoid tanning and light therapy, though: both can cause cataracts in people taking the herb.

The Skies

This month the crescent Moon passes by three planets in turn at dusk in the southwestern sky: Mars on March **8**th, Jupiter on the **9**th, and Saturn on the **10**th. March **17**: The gibbous Moon passes just above the bright star Regulus in the west after sundown. **19**: Full Moon, also known this month as the Lizard, Sap, and Awakening Moon. **20**: At 2:35 A.M. EST, the Vernal Equinox. Spring begins. **31**: Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn lie in a close grouping low in the west at sunset.

25 Years Ago

Larry McMurtry, writing in the March, 1975, issue of *The Atlantic Monthly*: "Throughout most of this century, two figures have stood opposed to one another in the legends of Texas: they are the cowboy and the multimillionaire. The figures represent two styles and two ideals, and the most basic of the many differences between them is that one style is essentially accumulative, while the other style is not. No cowboy ever had much—his claim was to grace, not goods. All millionaires have a lot, though what they have seldom instructs them in what to do with themselves. Scores of oil millionaires have spent their first surplus cash on a ranch, some cows, and, when possible, a cowboy or two, in the rather touching hope of being able to buy into an enterprise and a way of life that seems legitimate to them: such has been the force of the myth of the cowboy, even to this late date."

Illustrations by Kelly Alder

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What Makes History

The lessons of a New England landscape

Watercolor by Wendell Minor

THE best thing about winter is that I can go cross-country skiing from my front door. I live in Stockbridge, Massachusetts, where the sharp, determined lines of steeples and old houses manifest the tight certainties and revealed truths of the early settlers. The landscape is austere, and makes me long for the sensuousness of southern Europe, where I used to live. In fact, what I like about skiing here is that the perfection of the view concentrates my mind on the more troubled and passionate places on which I report.

by Robert D. Kaplan

Consider the Caucasus, the towering mountain system that separates Russia from the Middle East and is home to Chechens, Ingush, Georgians, Armenians, Azeris, and others. There, because of sectarian wars and internal rebellions following the fall of communism, more history has happened in the past decade than has happened in Stockbridge in the past 200 years. The Georgians alone have seen in just one century a Menshevist regime, civil war, Stalinist destruction and deportations, democracy, anarchy, and, finally, benign despotism, under Eduard Shevardnadze, which at this moment appears to be moving toward democracy.

That's history in heaps, and it's happening now. Where I live, the history, and the violence, happened then. In western New England white settlers arrived, gradually replaced the Native Americans, and then prospered under a democratic government. Here the population has increased only modestly since 1900, unlike in most other places in the world. And because the Native Americans had no written language, much of what occurred before the seventeenth century is a void.

In places the windy emptiness of the landscape through which I ski, marked by a river and fieldstone walls, suggests the frontier that Stockbridge once was. In the early eighteenth century Stockbridge and other towns nearby constituted the real frontier in North America. Being on the frontier required doing rather than imagining: clearing land, building shelter, obtaining food supplies. Frontiers test ideologies like nothing else. That, ultimately, is why America has not been friendly to communism, fascism, or other, more benign forms of utopianism. Idealized concepts have never taken firm root in America, and so intellectuals have had to look to Europe for inspiration. People here are too busy making money—an extension, of course, of the frontier ethos, with its emphasis on practical initiative.

Perhaps it was the extreme climate of eastern North America, with its heat, dampness, and freezing cold, that led not only the

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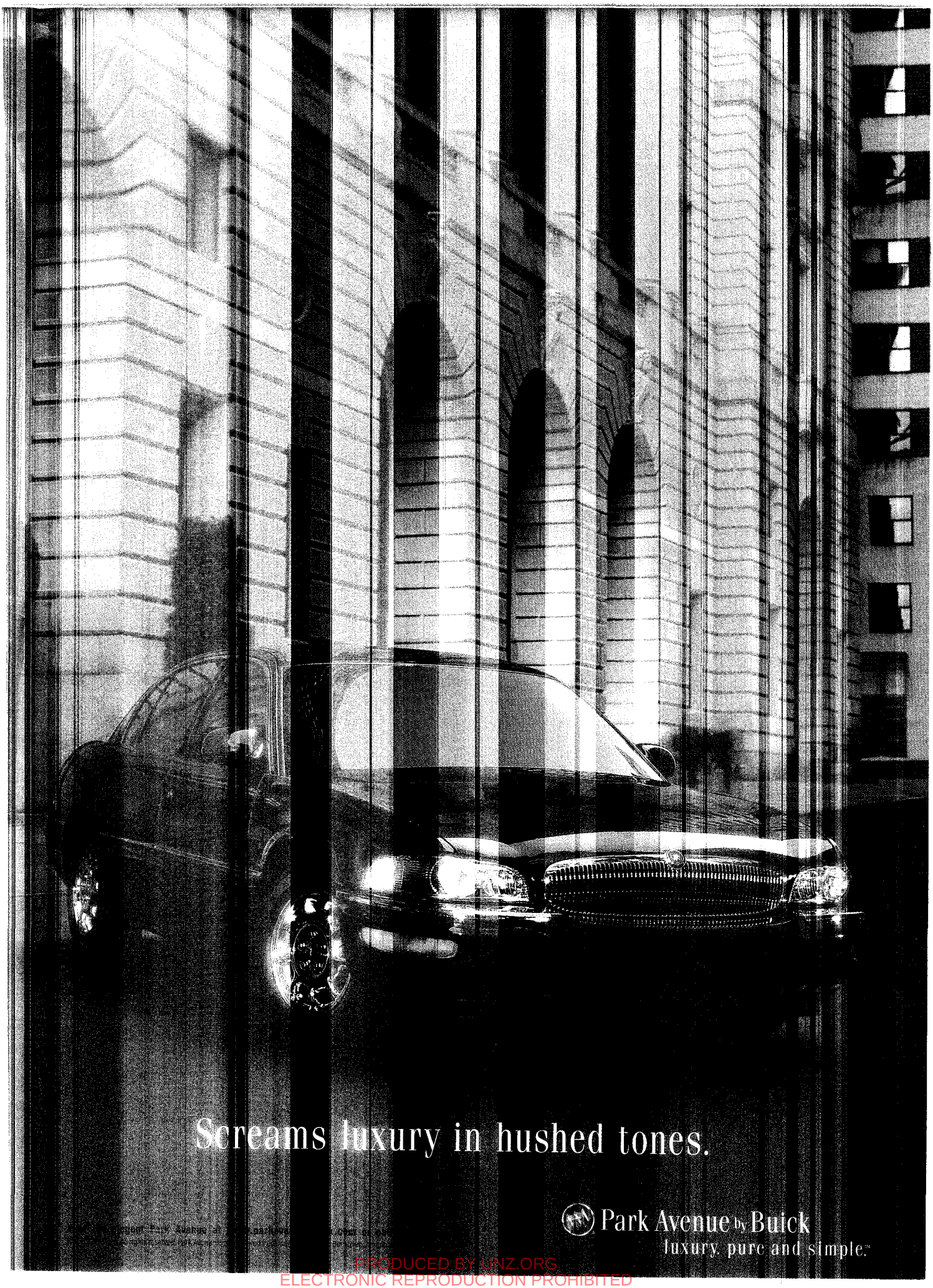

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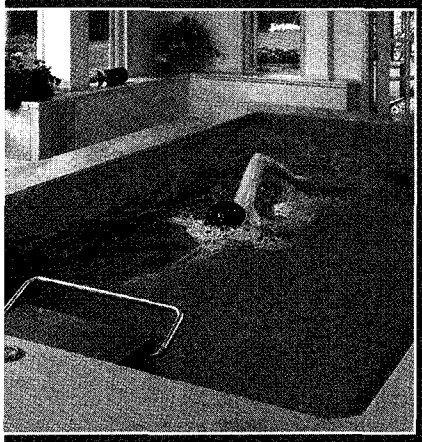

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Native American cultures but also the European one that replaced them to be far more functional and utilitarian than Europe. Americans rejected every ism, and that has been to the good. Even the "European Enlightenment," Daniel J. Boorstin, the former librarian of Congress, has written, "was in fact little more than the confinement of the mind in a prison of 17th- and 18th-century design." The Enlightenment, Boorstin argues, "itself acquired much of the rigidity and authoritarianism of what it set out to combat." In western Massachusetts, and elsewhere along this icy, unforgiving frontier, the Enlightenment encountered reality and was ground down to an applied wisdom of "common sense" and "self-evidence." In Europe an ideal could be beautiful or liberating all on its own; in frontier America it first had to show measurable results.

▪ ▪ ▪

The Enlightenment *philosophes*, comfortable in their salons, saw the state as the proper and rational instrument of progress; on the virginal slopes of the Appalachians the state was fine so long as it didn't get in the way of development. Because the Enlightenment was an intellectual discovery, it was, inevitably, elitist, whereas an oral philosophy of common sense issued from the ground up. To wit, the separation of Church and State in America was no *beau idéal* but a practical response to the fact that the rugged pioneer spirit of optimism and free thought begot different Protestant sects, and none of them held sway over the new political establishment. These sects competed fiercely for souls throughout New England. For the first time in recorded history faith became purely a matter of choice. Such free religious competition and the fervor that ensued became known as the Great Awakening. Democracy in America was the product of a specific culture's interaction with a harsh landscape.

The native inhabitants were part of that landscape. The Stockbridge Indians soothed the soul of Jonathan Edwards, the severest Calvinist of the Great Awakening, who came here in 1751 to write and to minister to them as part of an exile from the swirl of doctrinal controversy he had stirred up in Northampton. The Native Americans here were the first to be granted U.S. citizenship, in honor of their service as scouts in the Revolutionary War. But that is local minutiae, and the broader picture counts for more.

King Philip's War, in 1675–1676, was as brutal as any spate of Balkan atrocities, with native and white civilians, many of them children, central to the carnage. The settlers' losses were awful, but the war's end saw the virtual extinction of native life in southern New England. Though Native Americans fared better in western Massachusetts, the very process of development, combined with unsavory land deals, drove them onto reservations. The fact is, as King Philip's War proved, removing the Indians was eminently practical: the same applied wisdom that had made the rarefied notions of the Enlightenment usable for ruthlessly pragmatic settlers in North America also closed the door on accommodation with the native inhabitants. Here is an even more troubling reality: much or all of what America has achieved domestically and internationally might have been impossible had its dynamic new capitalist society—which emphasized self-discipline and industry and allowed the individual to rise above the group—been diluted by the mores of the native culture.

▪ ▪ ▪

"History," according to its Greek root, means merely a narrative, and a narrative that is rich and deep is often unresolvable. The Caucasus still endures such bloodshed because all the isms that promised utopia there have been reduced to ethnic blood feuds. The American narrative is morally unresolvable because the society that ultimately saved humanity in the great conflicts of the twentieth century was built on enormous crimes—slavery and the extinction of the native inhabitants.

History, though, can also be the story of ideas—and the more useful the idea, the greater the history. America's was an anti-idea: all philosophers are finally wrong, and the masses—left alone to seek their own interests—know best. Such democratic populism tempts cruelty and barbarism, and it cannot be successfully applied everywhere, even if Americans—the missionary zeal of the Great Awakening still within them—believe otherwise. Nonetheless, America's democratic populism broke ground in New England, where the necessities of frontier life overthrew Europe's established hierarchies. That, along with the removal of the native inhabitants, is the sum of history in western Massachusetts. Judging by its effect on the rest of the world, perhaps no other place has produced more history in these past thousand years.

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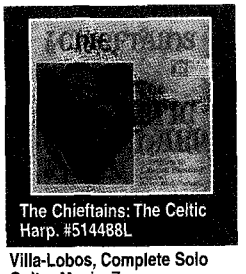

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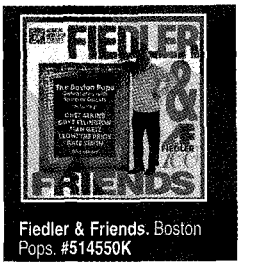

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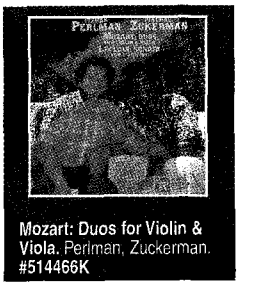

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Uncertain Objects of Desire

In India, a country that straddles the old and the new, a good place to look for signs of shifting values might be the matrimonial columns of The Times of India

by Chitra Divakaruni

WHEN I was twelve, I spent a summer with an aunt in Rourkela, a small town very different in flavor from Calcutta, where I lived. My aunt taught me to pickle mangoes and to make quilts out of old cotton saris—skills that my mother, a busy schoolteacher, either didn't possess or didn't care to teach me. For this reason I was fascinated by them.

My aunt also taught me a prayer ritual, or *vrata*, popular among unmarried girls. This ritual involved a weekly fast, an early-morning bath, the gathering of certain leaves and flowers, the pouring of water over a statue of Shiva, and a chant that went like this:

May I have a husband like Rama,
May I have a father-in-law like Dasharatha,
May I have a mother-in-law like Kaushalya,
May I have a brother-in-law like Lakshmana,
May I be a wife like Sita.

If performed faithfully for four years, the *vrata* guaranteed a happy marriage, complete with doting in-laws.

What Indian girl could resist such a *vrata*? I performed it zealously for years, in spite of the dubious look in my mother's eye—and the more insidious doubt in my own heart, the result of a convent-school education that scoffed at such "naive" superstitions. Still, I knew that as I chanted, I was calling up, syllable by syllable, the wonderful stranger my parents would select as my mate. (I would eventually get married, years later in America, to a delightful man whom, to my parents' dismay, I chose myself—an example, perhaps, of the unexpected, inscrutable ways in which *vratas* work.)

Rama and Sita, hero and heroine of the epic *Ramayana*, are the ideal couple of the Hindu tradition. My peers and I grew up on tales of his courage and caring, her beauty and strength of character, their appreciative and untroublesome in-laws, their mutual devotion in a time of

Illustration by Tristan Elwell

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polygamy. But for young men and women coming of age today, in the aftermath of independence and the women's-liberation movement, the old myth is problematic. How can they ignore the way the epic ends, with Rama banishing an innocent Sita from his kingdom because her virtue has been questioned by some of his subjects?

We must search elsewhere, then, for the heroes and heroines of a postmodern India,

Now it is the educated, professional woman, enthusiastic about living in a foreign country, who is in demand.

the new objects of our desire. The movies are one possibility. But the polychromatic Olympian figures of Juhi Chawla and Aamir Khan, the stars of countless Indian screen melodramas, are better suited to fantasy and hero worship. Marriage is a serious and pragmatic commitment, in the traditional Indian context involving significant financial transactions and requiring the blessing of parents and grandparents. In a country that straddles the old and the new, where discos and arranged bride-viewings flourish side by side, a good place to look might be the matrimonial columns of *The Times of India*, a leading national newspaper. Over a period of time the ads could help us to gauge whether the changes brought about by modernization—such as a growing work force of professional middle-class women, or the establishment of overseas Indian communities in England and the United States—have affected the nation's notions of suitable husbands and wives, or whether such notions, imprinted on our brain cells by centuries of tradition, remain unaltered. I selected ads from the past thirty years to see if I could discover any trends.

EVERY week *The Times of India* publishes several hundred carefully categorized matrimonial ads. These are mostly organized by community, caste, language, or religion, though new categories have recently crept in: "Doctors," "Working Girls," "Defence" (referring to army families). These ads, with their own vocabulary and shorthand, are the Indian counterpart to the personals found in Western newspapers and magazines (although certain progressive Indian magazines carry Indian versions of those as well). Usually the ads and responses are handled by parents—proof that the arranged marriage is alive and well in India. I have found in speaking with numerous couples whose marriages were arranged that although family compatibility is the starting point for such matches, most of the couples end up falling in love. For a number of reasons arranged marriages have a very high rate of success. One reason, Indians often joke, is that a traditional wedding lasts three to seven days. Most people can handle only one such ceremony in a lifetime.

Reading between the lines of two ads typical of their eras, one from 1969 and one from last year, reveals a great deal about the nature of desired partners then and now, and the protocol for finding them.

> Matrimonial correspondence invited from parents of smart, goodlooking girls as match for Gujarati Vaishnav (Khatri), M.S., engineer, 29, employed in New York. Graduate girl preferred. No dowry. Caste no bar. Should be willing to go to U.S.A. [3/5/69]

> Alliance invited from parents for Sindhi only fair tall son September 75/177 /10,000 B.Com/DVES well established business non smoker, non drinker, vegetarian from Sindhi tall good looking professionally educated girl. Preferably Doctor/Engineer/ Lawyer/CA response with photograph horoscope compulsory. [3/28/99]

Because parents initiated the marriage talks in both the ads above, a parent had to respond. For a young man or woman to do so would be considered forward. Many Indians believe that wrongly matched stars can create a lifetime of trouble for the couple; thus the demand for horoscopes. Even modern families who declare "caste no bar" will often require them. But caste compatibility is usually important as well. Families may include detailed birth-star and subcaste information in ads. We see this in an ad from 1969 that sought a match for a "Kerala Vadama Srivatsa Brahmin" boy (the phrase describes his sect) and stated, "Horoscopes with 2 'Doshas' [or weak star positions] admissible."

Offering details of the parents' careers and finances is common, as evidenced in an ad from 1969: "Agarwal groom preferably settled in Bombay for a Post Graduate well mannered beautiful girl 22, daughter of a highly placed business executive." Such information indicates the kind of social background the woman is used to, and discreetly invites a compatible match. Not all families are so tactful. One recent ad, as I recall it, reads, "Software professionals, doctors, or MBAs with six-figure salaries only need apply."

Traditionally, parents want a woman who is at least five years younger than their son. Twenty-five for a woman is pushing it. Ads confessing that a woman is twenty-seven or twenty-eight hasten to add that she looks younger. A certain amount of education in a woman is a plus, whether she will work or not. Convent-educated (or "convented," as thrifty word-counters put it) girls are considered assets to their husbands' careers, though some families caution that they are also looking for "religious, homely [home-loving] girl," "modern with a traditional touch." The bride should be fair or at least "wheatish" (skin color creates a hierarchy among Indians). Medium height is preferred—"177" in the "Alliance invited . . ." ad above refers to centimeters, describing a woman rather tall by Indian standards, which could be a disadvantage. In India as in much of the world, few families are eager to see their daughter-in-law tower over their son. And always the woman must be good-looking. The ubiquitous demand for "beautiful" women makes one wonder what fate awaits those who are not thus endowed.

The desirable male, on the other hand, is primarily a good provider. "Well settled" is a favorite adjective in the ads; "affluent" is another. Each is at least three times as common as "handsome" or even "smart." And although many parents like to arrange an early marriage for their sons, age is not a major issue. More important is a husband's profession, with women showing a strong preference in recent years for "medicos," software engineers, and MBAs. Equally significant are salary details and family finances, which matchmaking agencies will double-check for a fee.

> Matrimonial correspondence invited from parents of South Indian Brahmin girls of Non-Srivasta Gotram, good family background, goodlooking, reasonably accomplished, with ability to converse well in English, age 26–29

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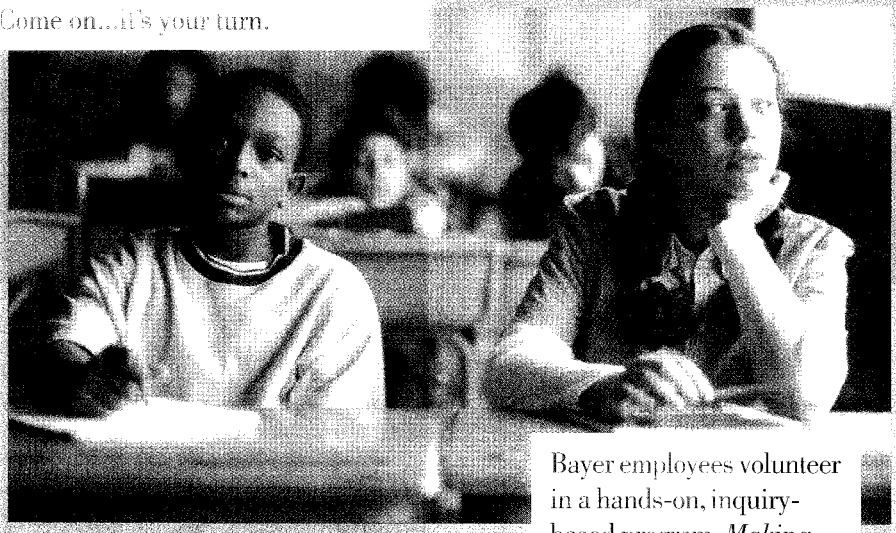

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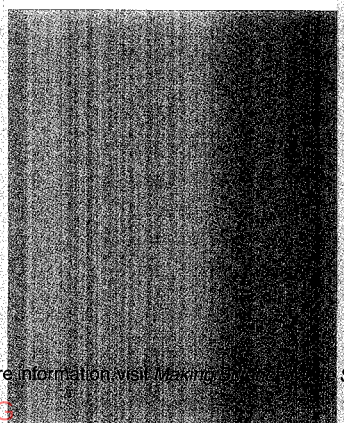

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height 160–170 cms. for a foreign returned executive engineer, aged 34, earning over 2500—of very good family background, references. Please apply . . . giving full particulars together with horoscope. [2/2/69]

Overseas well educated company Director, Hindi, English speaking of Hindu Brahmin family, handsome with beautiful home, car, office, servants and other facilities, age 30. Invites matrimonial proposals from girls, preferably lady doctors and lawyers, wonderful opportunity to establish own practice. Race, religion, caste no bar. [2/2/69]

An examination of thirty years' worth of matrimonial ads also reveals important changes in attitude toward the Indian diaspora. The first ad I cited from 1969, when the original swell of Indian immigrants came to the United States, declared that the bride-to-be should be willing to go abroad. This would demonstrate her adaptability: she agreed to endure the hardships of a strange land. But resettlement was certainly not something that either she or her parents would wish for: the popular feeling was that only boys who couldn't make it in the home country went abroad. As late as 1979 expatriate men looking for hometown wives needed to prove their worth and not be finicky: "London settled handsome Gujarati Research Chemist, owning property, car, drawing Rs. 10,000-per month, height 170 cms., 33 but looks 30, seeks matrimonial alliance, no bar, send particulars."

Women have shown a strong preference in recent years for "medicos," software engineers, and MBAs.

An additional worry for families was that once abroad, impressionable young people might forget their duties to family and bloodline and allow themselves to be lured into marrying foreigners. Here is an ad with a distinctly panicky tone:

Matrimonial correspondence invited for Brahmin Engineer, 27 serving in America, drawing 6,000 per month, from parents of respected Brahmin girl, Medico, engineer or science graduate, immediately, as boy will fly back soon. [3/6/69]

Over the course of the next twenty years the tide turned. By 1989 being a prospective groom—or (rarer) bride—who lived abroad was a distinct advantage. Someone thus situated could unabashedly demand more.

Australian residents, North Indian sisters (Aristocratic Kshatriya Zamindar ancestry) aged 29 and 27 years, very pretty, and cultured, living in Sydney seek matrimonial alliance with refined Indian gentlemen of excellent family background, prosperous businessmen or highly qualified Chartered Accountants, Actuaries, Dentists, Orthodontists, Medical specialists good natured, very ambitious, willing to settle in Australia. Girls visiting India soon. [2/26/89]

And although England, Canada, or Australia was acceptable, by last year the United States had become the destination of choice, for which many bargaining points were willingly surrendered.

Really beautiful very fair slim tall BE/ME (Comp/Electronic) MCA girl from reputed Hindu family . . . for Vaish (Madhesiya), very fair handsome boy 29/180/65 M.Tech Software Engr. in USA on H-1 visa coming India next month. Early marriage. [3/14/99]

By last year *The Times of India* had a long column titled "NRI [nonresident Indian]/Green Card." And the Internet had arrived in the marriage supermarket. Kalpana Shah, a matchmaker, sent in a group advertisement for eight potential brides (with caste information and vital statistics) who all wanted grooms from "USA/UAE/UK." "All brides are beautiful attractive & slim," Shah assured us. Her Web site is www.kalpanashah.com. A typical entry reads,

At present California/U.S.A. working as a product marketing manager, beautiful, slim, fair, highly educated from well settled family, 39 yrs, Bengali, Education MBA/MS/MSc/BSc from USA. Wanted highly educated officer or well settled businessman first preference U.S.A. based. Caste no bar. [12/29/99]

As more immigrants settle abroad, NRIs are beginning to prefer other NRIs, or at least "Green card holder H-1 visa"—a status that allows the recipient to live and work in the United States for long periods. This is in part to ensure cultural compatibility and in part a response to a prevalent urban legend about unscrupulous Indians who marry NRIs in order to get a green card and then shrug off their spouses with a quick divorce.

Perhaps because Indian women are now better educated and more likely to be financially independent, remarriage has grown more acceptable. The traditional stigma attached to divorce and widowhood has lessened. Whereas in 1969 and 1979 a number of ads specified "divorcees, widows, please excuse," last year several feminist ads read "dowry seekers excused." Now, in columns titled "Second Marriage" and "Cosmopolitan," people seek another chance at happiness.

30/156 (looks much younger) M.Sc. B.Ed., PDCA fair, smart charming cultured convented legal divorcee (few months marriage), Hindu Yogi Bhardwaj learning classical music & dance, father class-I officer seeks caring considerate & anti-dowry match. Jovial, humble, respects human values. Responses only from people who admire & have at least some of these qualities well settled issueless below 34 with pleasing personality. Photo horoscope must. No bar. [9/19/99]

US Citizen, high caste Gujarati Hindu handsome athletic 53 (looking 38) 175 cm 65 Kg innocent divorcee Engineer/Music Composer/Published Poet, looking for a loving wife (35-48) for life. Singer preferred. [6/27/99]

Advertisers almost always characterize a divorce as "innocent," meaning that it did not arise from adultery—which makes one wonder where all the "guilty" divorced parties have gone.

A few lines of tiny print—and yet in them are buried the stories of entire lives, tragic or comic. ("Alliance for Kshatriya boy 29/5'8"/5000. Professional harmonium/synthesizer player. Good family background. Partially weak vision.") Laced with hope and desperation, these ads hold out the promise of transformation in a society where one's place is still largely determined by caste, class, and connections.

Middle age divorcee but youthful, internationally travelled, dynamic, successful businessman, Indian, good family Hindu background, now Baha'i

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believes in one God & humankind as one family, tall 183 cm. fair good looks, pleasant, caring, broadminded, East-west values. U.K. citizen, residing London. Would like to meet pretty youthful girl, loving, sincere, homely, friend, independent, age thirty/forties, reasonably educated with useful profession i.e. artist, music, writer, media, business, medical, computer etc. No bar of colour, caste, religion, nationality, divorcee, veg/nonveg. [1/24/99]

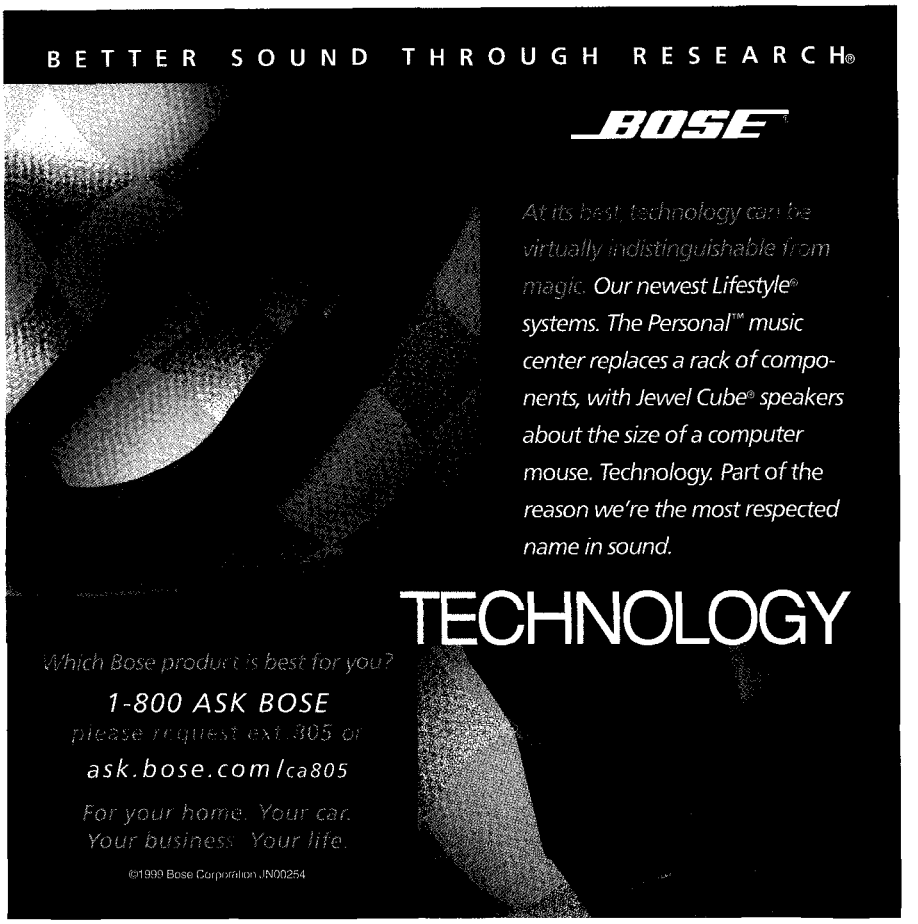
It is easy to fall into a daydream over them, to imagine one's ideal mate. Even I, solidly married for twenty years now, find myself, in reading these ads, stirred by the adventure, the Russian-roulette nature of the enterprise.

I am 42, industrialist successful businessman music lover adventurist, with creative mind fun loving person in need of an alliance who is adjustable good natured independent interested in living life in full swing. Please send photograph . . . [1/17/99]

A study of the past thirty years of matrimonial ads points to an interesting fact. Whereas the concept of the ideal husband has remained more or less the same (he should be a solid provider who comes from a reliable family), the definition of the ideal wife today is very different. Whereas in-laws once looked for wives who were young, beautiful, home-loving, and biddable, now (perhaps because of increased input from the prospective groom) it is the educated, professional, adventurous woman, enthusiastic about living in a foreign country, broad-minded enough to consider a divorced man for her mate, who is in demand. Perhaps this echoes a larger pattern of social movement in which the Indian woman's role is changing more rapidly than the Indian man's.

But ultimately, India defies generalization. Just when I think I've figured out the nature of Indian desire, "intent matrimony," and its trajectory over the past thirty years, I come across something like this:

Are you fair beautiful Lady unable to take full-fledged domestic matrimonial responsibilities for career or family commitments then do not deprive yourself the happiness of life. Tall fair loving caring and understanding highly educated successful Bombay based Industrialist is looking for you to share all kinds of happiness life can offer from life-time alliance. Write all details. [3/14/99]



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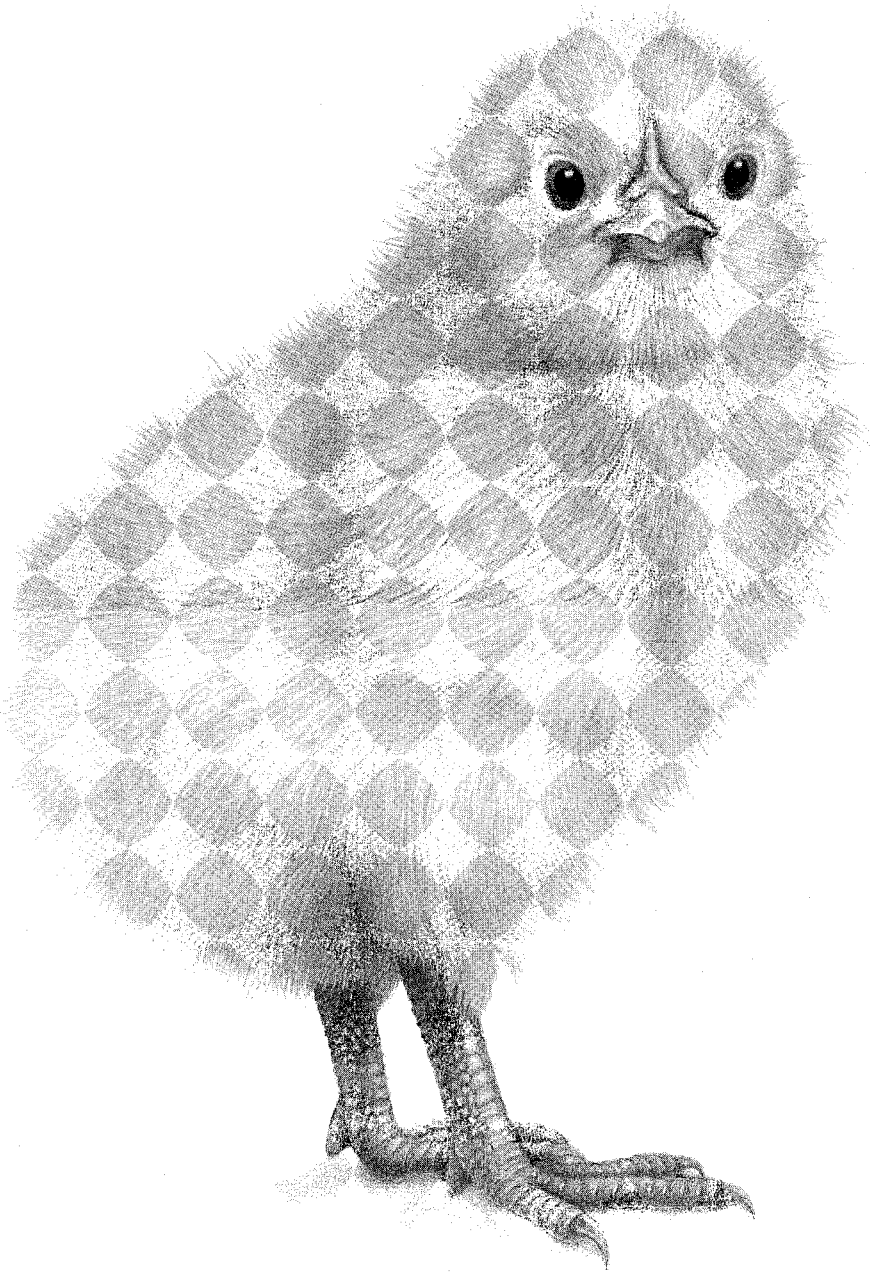

The Joy of Sexing

Sixty years spent telling one newly hatched bird from the next

by Brian Doyle

"TWO years ago I sexed my last chick," Hugh Grove said. "I walked away. It was time. I was relieved to be done. I quit cutting my thumbnail just so, and put my smock and bucket and light away, and that was that. No regrets. The time comes, and you've got to face it like a man."

Grove was standing in a field of garlic on a hill in Oregon's farm country, not far from the mountains of the Coast Range. He was talking about independent poultry sexing—discerning the sex of a newborn chick—which was a commercial skill in great demand in mid-twentieth-century America. Grove was born in Canyonville, in southwest Oregon, in 1919. As a teenager he came north to work on Charlie Wilson's farm, near Newberg. "There were a couple of gals sexing chicks there," he explained, "and Mrs. Wilson said to me, 'There's a good job for you.' So I learned the business, from a Mrs. Hickey, who was a great sexer. She was a terrific sexer. This was 1937, in Mary's Corners, Washington."

The art of determining the sex of chicks in less than three seconds apiece began about a year before Mrs. Hickey set to teaching Hugh the business. Prompted by the Chicken of Tomorrow Contest, in which chicken breeders from all over North America vied to produce the broadest-breasted chicken, a guild of artists came into being each of whom soon could sex 1,200 newly hatched chicks an hour, hour after hour, all the while making only a handful of errors. They were highly sought after and were paid handsomely for their work.

For as long as human beings have raised chickens, hens generally have been the stars, as layers, breeders, and better eating than the tough-muscled males. But roosters as a class got their worst blow in the late 1930s, when the great hatcheries, avid for the Chicken of Tomorrow prize, came up with feed so effective that two pounds would produce a pound of chicken meat. The new feed was expensive, though, and suddenly hatcheries were in a hurry to know which new chicks were female, and thus worth feeding. Waiting six weeks or so for the sex of this or that ball of fluff to become obvious would be costly. And so was born the sexer, sharp of eye and patient of mien, soft of hand (squeezing a chick just a little too hard produces a messy handful of former chick) and strong enough to stay alert and accurate through an entire hatch, which could be many thousands of chicks. Chickens take about twenty-one days to hatch—eighteen days in the incubator and then three days in a "hatcher," where the temperature hovers between 99.50° and 99.75°. A good hatch manager can time his hatch to the hour.

"I started with Leghorn cockerel chicks and then did turkeys," Grove said. "Over the years I've sexed geese, ducks, quails, pheasants, partridges—even canaries, which you have to sex by using a cro-

Illustration by Karen Kluglein

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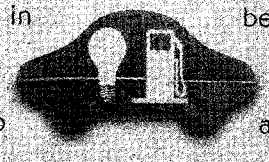
a car that sometimes runs on gas power and sometimes runs on electric power from a company that always runs on brain power

The Toyota Prius. Introducing a breakthrough in environmental technology. The Prius combines a super-efficient gasoline engine, an electric motor powered by a battery that never needs to



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chet needle to get them open. And wild turkeys, too, when some doctors and dentists in Oregon got some from Mexico and wanted to hatch and release them in the Coast Range—which they did, and they've done very well. Smart bird.

"But I've done a hell of a lot of chickens—more chickens than anything else. Millions of chickens. *Millions.* I opened more chickens than any hundred chefs and cooks you could find. Rhode Island reds, Parmenter reds, White Rocks, white Leghorns—those are the easiest, probably. Barred Rocks—those you can tell by color, too. Rock Cornish hens, and then black turkeys, Beltsville turkeys, whites, bourbon reds, Narragansetts, and bronzes. I've sexed twenty-eight thousand turkeys in a row—a planeload to be sent to Utah. The Mormons are crazy for turkeys. I could sex as many as fifteen hundred turkeys an hour. That's about one every two seconds. And I was one of the best. I guaranteed ninety-nine percent accuracy, and there's not many fellas who could say that—or gals either."

"I've sexed geese, ducks, quails, pheasants—even canaries. But I've done more chickens than anything else. Millions of chickens."

I asked Grove what happened to all the males he has tossed gently to one side for sixty years.

"Sometimes hatcheries kill them right off and sell them to mink farms, where they're mixed in with the feed," he said. "There are some birds where the males *are* good meat, but even with those you want to separate the males from the females as soon as you can, because the males will fight if they're around the females, and then after a few months they'll start trying to mate with the females and causing a ruckus."

I asked what bird I'm buying when I buy a chicken in the Safeway.

"A Cornish–White Rock cross, generally," Grove told me. "This bird will get to six pounds by eight weeks or so. They grow so fast they outgrow their legs, and their legs can't support them. That's why poultry raisers sell them at eight weeks."

We walked slowly around Grove's house so that he could refill his hummingbird feeders. I asked him if he had ever sexed a hummingbird. "Not yet. Came close with those canaries. Be hard to catch a hummer right from the shell."

What is the biggest bird he ever sexed?

"Wild turkey. Big, strong bird. I was asked to sex an emu once, but I didn't do it. Too big. It'd be a battle to open it, and they can kick your brains out, you know."

I ASKED Grove to sex a bird for me, to show me how it's done. He looked around his yard for a candidate, but the only small birds in sight were the hummingbirds buzzing at his feeders. We retreated to the porch, where he sketched a chick and then held the paper in his left hand.

"Well, there are four or five ways to sex," Grove said, his right hand poised like a hawk over the chick. "There's wing-sexing, which is sexing by the arrangement of feathers on the edge of the wing. They're different in cocks and pullets.

"Then there's sexing with a glass—a kind of telescope or microscope that you wear on your eye, like a pair of spectacles that's grown out long on the one side. I tried those, but they were just in the way.

"Then there's the way the Japanese do it, which is to hold the bird backwards"—he flipped the paper south to north—"so it's facing away. I did it the other way around, with the bird lying there in my hand looking at me as I spread it.

"Then there's a way to do it where you use your two forefingers and pinch and pull. Not me. I used my right thumbnail." He cocked his thumb and brought it to bear on the paper chick.

"The nail has to be *just* the right length. I was very careful about cutting it exactly right, and to tell you the truth, now that I'm not sexing anymore, it's kind of relaxing to let it grow or cut it back and not worry about it. I reach in with the nail and flip the flap open, see? And then fold the other with my left forefinger, see? You're looking for hardness and softness—that's the easiest way to explain it—and a certain arrangement of lines in a pullet, and equipment the size of a pinhead in a cockerel. In a turkey you're looking for lines that look like crosshairs on a gunsight. I'd have a coffee can nearby—as you take them from the hatch, you squeeze real gently and they lose their mess, which you want them to do so you can see more clearly down there. And they're damned ready to lose their mess, because they're scared, you know; they've never been touched before. I wore an apron to protect my clothes, and I'd have a bright light overhead. I used to use a two-hundred-watt light but finally went to a three-hundred-watt light when my eyes started to go a little. That's why I quit—because my eyes were going a little, and because of my back troubles."

Once he'd squeezed the chick ever so gently, and folded open the tiny genital flaps to ascertain the sex of the bird, he would flip it to the left (female) or right (male), into boxes that a "swamper" kept ready. The swamper was a jack-of-all-trades assistant; he or she set and reset feeder trays of chicks so that they would proceed in a steady stream toward the sexer's left hand; set, reset, and labeled the boxes for sexed chicks; and counted the chicks as they quickly filled the boxes, twenty-five to a box. The swamper also plied the sexer with coffee and sandwiches at regular intervals and often drove the sexer back and forth to work so that the sexer, whose shift could easily stretch to twenty hours or more, could snatch some sleep. The rise of mega-hatcheries has forced the swamper, and the independent sexer who employed the swamper, into general obsolescence.

I asked Grove about his colleagues. Were there many female sexers?

"There were a few gals in the business, but mostly it was men," Grove said. "You had to travel around to where the business was. I was an independent sexer, registered as such with the State of Oregon. I sexed in Ohio, Maryland, Delaware, Kansas, New Jersey, Kentucky, West Virginia, Pennsylvania, Washington, Idaho—even Hawaii once, when there was an emergency and the guy they had got sick. I don't know how they found me, but they did—a phone call at night, and off I went. There was good money—seventy-five dollars a week in 1938, when I was sexing out of Ohio, real good money for then. These last years I'd get a cent per chick, two or three cents per turkey. It's piecework—that's why you have to be so fast."

Who was the greatest sexer ever?

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"Well, it was a tough job, and very hard to learn—maybe one in thirty folks who tried it got the hang of it, and maybe one in a hundred was good enough to be a professional. But I thought the very best were from the Northwest, and maybe the best of all was Johnny."

"Johnny" was Johnny Hada—such a legend in the sexing world that he is still usually referred to by his first name alone. Like many legendary figures, Johnny had to overcome terrific adversity—in his case, imprisonment in a Japanese-American internment camp in Idaho during World War II. He retired from sexing about twenty years ago and died in 1995.

Now Grove is thinking about the old days, the 1940s and 1950s, when he sexed for a slew of little Oregon hatcheries that are gone. He names a bunch of them and then gets to thinking about the huge chick factories of the past.

"I sexed in some of the biggest hatcheries in the world, like Morris Hatcheries, in Maryland and Delaware, where they hatched two hundred thousand chicks at a time, and Weans Hatchery, in Vineland, New Jersey—hatcheries so big that they had little railroads running through them to haul boxes of chicks. I'd take a break just for a sandwich and coffee, and then right back at it. I went thirty-three hours straight one time; that was my record. That was at Hart's, in Beaverton. I started out doing fifteen hundred an hour and finished doing maybe seven hundred. I was *tired*."

As in many modern American industries, the small company has increasingly given way to the mammoth corporation. With the size of hatcheries increasing and the popularity of chicken meat growing, production became more ordered and regulated, and Grove's freelance style of sexing declined. Today most sexers are salaried, and they work regular shifts at large hatcheries.

"There was about sixty years there when a real good independent sexer was a popular man," Grove said. "But those days are gone now. I don't miss them, no. I miss the money a little—you could make forty thousand dollars a year, and you were your own boss and you saw the country. But I'm done now. I don't miss it. I've seen enough damn chicken asses. But I never got tired of chickens. I never stopped eating them. Had chicken last night, I'll tell you. Pullet." ❦

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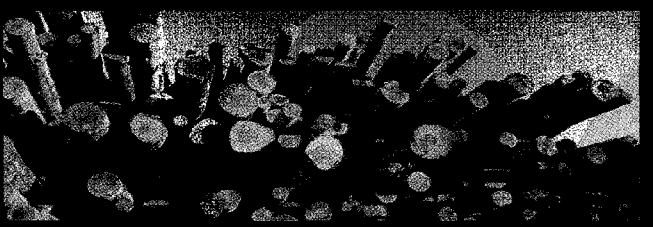

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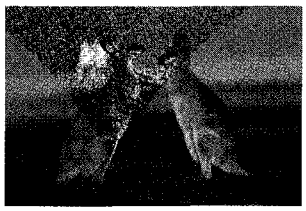


The Edge of the World

Tasmania is the Australia, in miniature, that tourists travel so far to see

by Jamie James

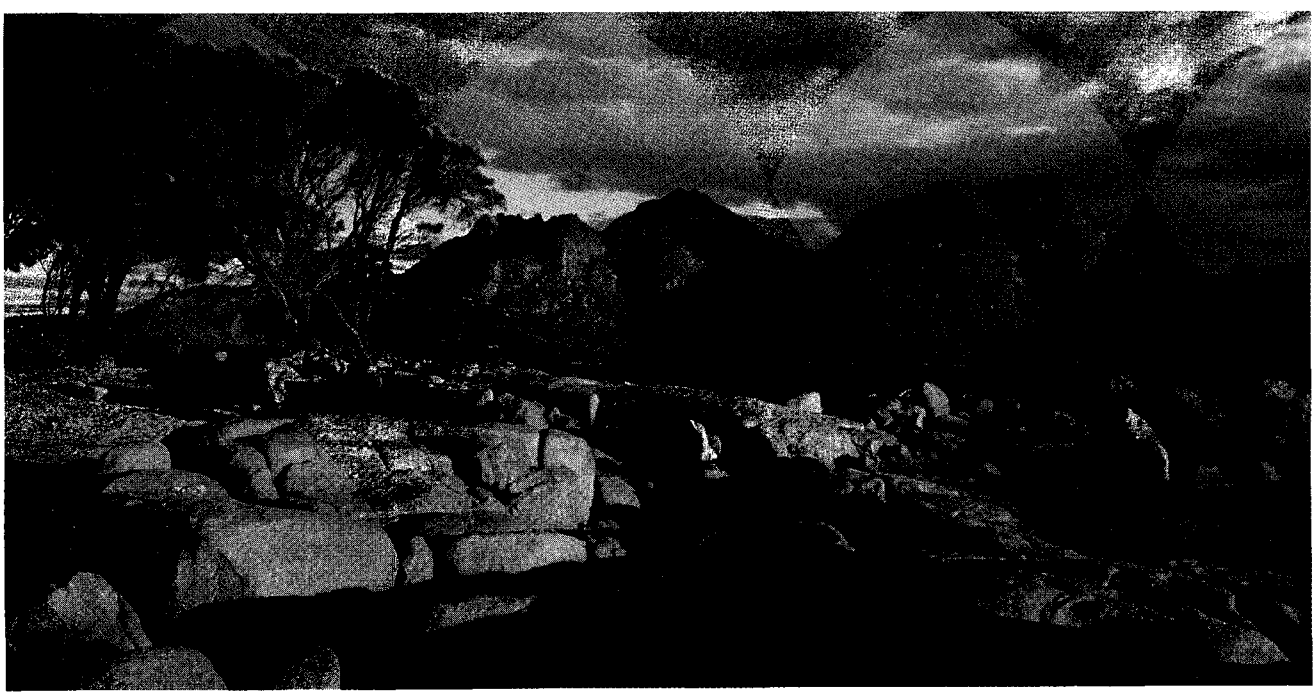
RENAISSANCE cartographers portrayed the edge of the known world as an evil, enchanted place, where storms raged and bizarre creatures lurked. Sailors foolhardy enough to venture there were believed to face certain death. Yet resolute explorers pushed the world's edge ever farther back, until the map finally wrapped around the globe. The known world is now the entire world. Almost: adventurous travelers can still capture the feeling of arriving at the edge of terra cognita by visiting Tasmania. Australia itself is remote from almost everywhere else, but Tasmania, a small island state, which dangles like a pendant from the mainland's southeastern tip, is about as far from anywhere as it's possible to go. The island *is* an enchanted place, but a decidedly hospitable one. It does rain from time to time, but Tasmania has no more storms than most other places. All manner of bizarre creatures lurk in the wilderness, but it's a fainthearted explorer who's afraid of wallabies, wombats, and platypuses.

Tasmania has within manageable compass almost everything that attracts travelers to Australia. It's as if the mainland's essence were distilled and concentrated in one compact place. Its coastline is as gorgeous as the Great Barrier Reef; its interior wilderness contains one of the largest stands of virgin temperate rain forest in the world, incomparably rich in wildlife; its historical heritage is fascinating and well preserved; its food and wine are superb. The only thing Australian it lacks is desert.

Tasmania is also amazingly undervisited: the island receives fewer than 75,000 foreign travelers a year (the Empire State Building gets that many visitors in a week), though it's very popular with mainland Australians. You can walk for hours in the national parks and not meet any other two-legged creatures, unless they be wallabies or kangaroos. Travelers planning a trip to Australia this fall for the Olympic Games might consider getting away from the crowds for a week in scenic, salubrious Tasmania. North American fall is the Antipodean spring, a good time to visit. The only time to avoid

Top, Tasmanian wallabies; bottom, Coles Bay, Freycinet National Park, eastern Tasmania

TOP: JEN AND DES BARTLETT; BOTTOM: GREG PROBST/TONY STONE IMAGES



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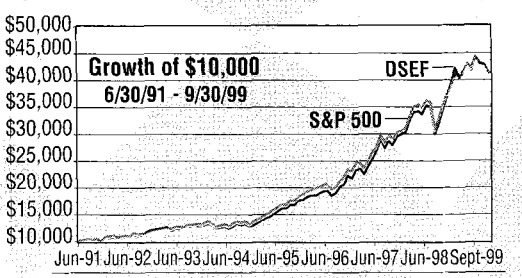

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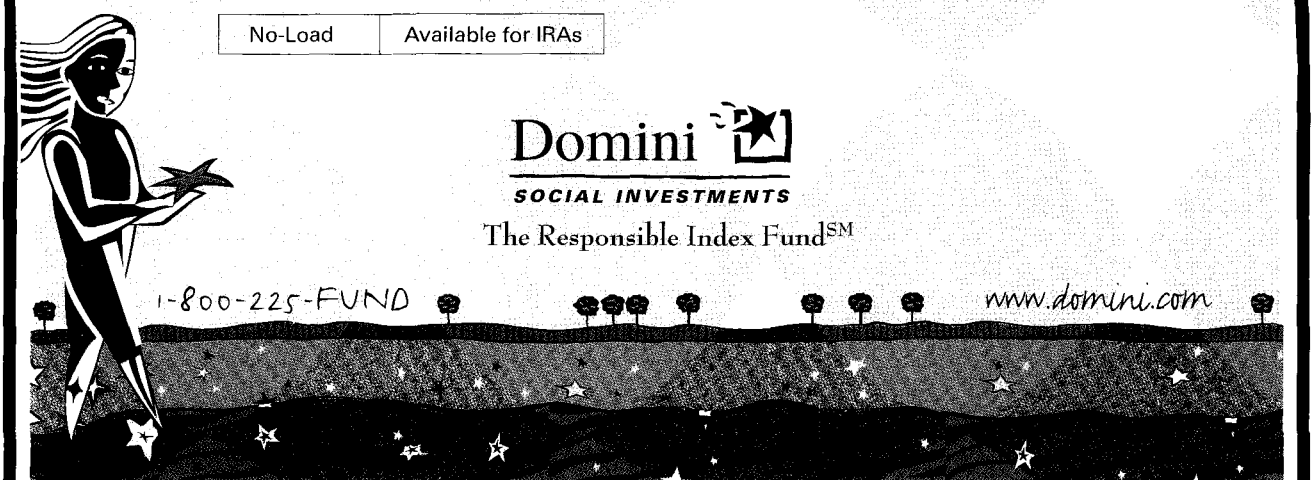

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GRILLY BERNARD/TONY STONE IMAGES

One of the largest stands of virgin temperate rain forest in the world, Gordon River Valley, in western Tasmania

is Tasmania's damp, cold winter—our summer months. And the prices will make you think you've traveled back in time twenty years. Sydney is a bargain for Americans, but Tasmania is downright cheap: when you convert your American dollars into Australian ones, they swell in the most pleasing way.

Throughout its history Tassie, as the Australians call it, has attracted a rugged breed of people who have come and stayed. The first wave of Western inhabitants, the convicts transported from Great Britain, came involuntarily; but in modern times the island has held a special appeal for visionaries, explorers drawn to the far end of the earth.

UNTIL the twentieth century Tasmania was almost entirely wilderness, so no one saw much need to create parks. One of the pioneers in the island's national-park movement was an Austrian outdoorsman named Gustav Weindorfer, who bushwalked the mountainous interior, fell in love with the sublime landscape, and never left. In 1912 Weindorfer and his wife, Kate, built a pine chalet next to Dove Lake, at the foot of Cradle Mountain, and the couple lived there for the rest of their lives. Today most visitors to Cradle Mountain National Park stop for a look at Waldheim ("Forest Home"), which is just as rustic as its name, set in the midst of a grove of gnarled pines and myrtle—all covered with brilliant-green moss.

"Hobbity, isn't it?" said Di Hollister, a guide provided by the Tasmanian government, which was my host on this trip. At first I thought Di was using a strange Australianism (the words are sometimes as odd as the animals Down Under), but she was referring to Tolkien, and the invocation was apt. A mist blanketed the forest that morning, but the thick cover of boughs kept the winding track dry. The dense air was saturated with the emerald sheen of the moss, and I almost did expect to see wee folk darting among the knobby roots of the trees.

When I got to know Di a bit better, she let slip that she had been a member of the state parliament, representing the Green Party. In the 1960s and 1970s environmentalists and bushwalkers like Di came together to oppose a series of industrial projects, including hydroelectric dams and pulp mills, that would have had a devastating effect on the wilderness. The state's Green Party emerged from this coalition, and at one point it held five of the thirty-five parliamentary seats, enabling it to push through strong environmental legislation. Today Tasmania's wilderness enjoys greater legal protection than that of any other state of Australia: 20 percent of its land has World Heritage status, and is therefore in a class with the Taj Mahal and the Grand Canyon.

Every visitor to Tasmania soon learns that according to international health organizations, the island has the cleanest air and water in the world. Di worked this fact into the conversation five minutes after I met her. The island is also remarkable for some of the things it doesn't have: fruit flies, for example. Houseflies, yes, but no fruit flies. Unlike the mainland, it also lacks foxes (the settlers here weren't exactly the riding-to-hounds set), which is good news for wallabies and other slow-moving marsupials.

There are many ways to see the wilderness in Tasmania, from camping in the wild to staying in Waldheim-style huts or posh lodges, yet even around places of this last kind, the critters are everywhere. When I checked in at Cradle Mountain Lodge, which is adjacent to the park, I found a mother wallaby munching away on the grass beside my cabin, with her little joey peeking out of her pouch. On a short walk to the park entrance we immediately chanced upon a wombat, who looked up calmly, turned his broad rump to us, and scuttled away. "The usual view," Di said.

I'm a great fan of all mammals (well, most mammals—I can do without rats and bats), but it must be said: marsupials are the cutest. Even blasé urban-canyon dwellers and hardhearted pulp-mill magnates tend to get all sappy and silly around wombats and wallabies. I never did see a Tasmanian devil, the cutest, and also the meanest, marsupial of them all—an omission that I think was more disappointing to Di than to me. I told her that my main quest was to see a kangaroo (what's a trip to Australia without seeing a kangaroo?), but she ruefully informed me that kangaroos live on Tasmania's coastal plains.

AFTER Cradle Mountain, Hobart, Australia's second oldest city (Sydney is the oldest), seemed like Manhattan. With a population of slightly under 200,000, Hobart is just big enough to feel like a real city. According to a government fact sheet, Tasmania has "the greatest complement of historic buildings in Australia"; I'm not sure how such things are measured, but you can certainly wander around the streets of Hobart for an hour without seeing more than a handful of twentieth-century buildings—and many of those are charming examples of British Art Deco.

Much of the architecture in the city center is Georgian in style, constructed from golden-hued sandstone. Salamanca Place, a long, straight row of beautiful

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sandstone warehouses on the harbor, dates back to the 1830s, when Hobart was a whaling port. The district has been redeveloped for shops, galleries, and restaurants, and is now the center of the city's nightlife. The old residential sections contain street after street of trig Victorian cottages, every one with a tiny rose garden in front.

I stayed in such a cottage, part of a bed-and-breakfast managed by another of those visionary edge-seekers, a Dutchman named Wilmar Bouman, and his partner, Matthew Ryan, an Englishman who grew up in Tasmania. When Bouman was twenty-two, he and his parents and his brother decided to leave Holland, so they looked around the world and chose Tasmania. Soon after they moved here, Bouman met Ryan, and the two began restoring old houses together. They finally settled in Corinda, an Italianate Victorian mansion fallen to the condition of derelict boarding house, on a hill overlooking the harbor. They restored the outbuildings at Corinda and furnished them with antiques and period bric-a-brac for paying guests.

I stayed at the gardener's cottage, on the edge of Bouman's exquisite formal parterre. Pleached lime trees, box, and old yews form enclosures, each with its own color scheme, "painted" with fritillaries, hellebores, and, of course, roses. I went into the garden at dusk, taking a book to read but instead finding myself watching the parakeets and kookaburras dart about. Bumblebees buzzed industriously; butterflies flittered. The edge of the world couldn't have seemed more like the center of an orderly universe.

A brick wall running alongside this oasis was built before the house, when the land was a vegetable garden worked by convicts. In no other state of Australia does the convict past loom so palpably. British magistrates continued to transport convicts to Tasmania for thirteen years after they stopped sending them to New South Wales, in 1840, and when convicts on the mainland committed crimes, they were sent to Port Arthur, on the Tasman Peninsula, southeast of Hobart—the cruelest and most feared prison in a cruel, fearsome system.

Tasmanians are quite open about the convict period; Di cheerfully told me what rascals her great-great-grandparents had been. I confess that before I went to Tasmania, I was a bit apprehensive about

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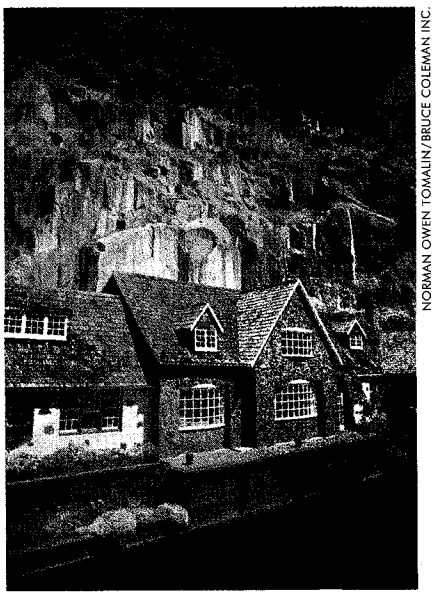
visiting a place where so many people are descended from criminals; even some fashionable neighborhoods in Sydney can be scary at night, with prostitutes and drug dealers and what used to be known more generally as riffraff. Yet as I explored Tasmania, it seemed to me noticeably less rowdy than the mainland—or than my own neighborhood in New York City, for that matter. Opium poppies happen to be a major cash crop here, but they are grown for export to American pharmaceutical companies; the island was chosen both because its climate is ideal for growing poppies and because the level of illegal-drug use is low. As I traveled around the island, I kept thinking how much more British it was, in a cozy, Jane Austen-y way, than any part of the mainland I've seen.

At Port Arthur, I saw a very uncozy side of the British. It's a sinister place; I felt a chill as soon as I clapped eyes on it. The site was chosen because the Tasman Peninsula at one point is 200 feet across: to prevent escapes, platforms with ferocious chained dogs were placed at intervals across the neck of land, Cerberuses guarding a penal hell. The cuffed and fettered prisoners were worked like slaves in granaries and coal mines, confined in tiny lightless cells, and whipped mercilessly when they broke the strict rules. Many went mad; some committed murder or other capital crimes to find release from their suffering in the hangman's noose.



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A re-created gunpowder mill in Launceston, northern Tasmania's commercial center

In 1877 the prison was finally closed, and modern Tasmania began to emerge from the gloom of the penal era. Every visitor to the island should have a look at the Port Arthur Historic Site. It's well interpreted and beautifully landscaped, and the ninety-minute drive from Hobart passes through some spectacular coastal scenery. But this is definitely an educational experience, not a fun outing.

THE only sensible way to see Tasmania is by car. Don't make the mistake of getting on a plodding bus tour just because the Australians drive on the wrong side of the road. The roads are excellent here, the traffic thin, and the drivers polite; no competent driver will have any difficulties. The island is also just the right size for driving: the trip from Hobart, on the south coast, to Launceston, Tasmania's second largest city, in the north, takes a leisurely day, and one passes through some delightful villages stocked with early-nineteenth-century sandstone bridges, churches, and houses.

In Oatlands we saw the seventy-five-foot-tall Callington Mill, built in 1837. A handsome gray-haired woman, who seemed to be in charge, told me that if I was willing to oversee the restoration of the windmill, I could move into the miller's cottage for a dollar a year. The town of Ross (pop. 282) is famous for its graceful convict-built bridge and tiny women's prison; almost all the buildings are limestone Georgians, but the village was too self-consciously quaint for my taste. If you wanted to, you could stay the night there at Apple Dumpling Cottage or Church Mouse Cottage (the rate for the latter, the equivalent of $60 U.S. a night, seemed a bit steep for a church mouse's budget). Back on the road we saw a cheese factory, a run-down mansion full of antiques and Salvator Rosa paintings, and a family farm open to the public, which is now run by the great-great-great-grandson of the man who established it, in 1824. At a jumble sale I bought a copy of the memoirs of that doughty embodiment of Australia's buoyant self-confidence, Dame Edna Everage.

Launceston, founded in 1805, is Australia's third oldest city, if a place with a population of 70,000 qualifies as a city—you can walk from one end of town to the other in twenty minutes. The period architecture is mostly Victorian,

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much of it in a fine state of preservation; there's a spectacular cataract gorge just outside the center of town, some lovely public gardens, and an impressive old water mill. But the best reason to come this way is to tour the island's northern wine country. Though the industry in Tasmania is young, it produces some wines that rival the mainland's best—and that's saying a lot. The sparkling wines are particularly fine; have a glass of Lake Barrington Alexandra with fresh-shucked Tasmanian oysters and you'll forget there's a place called France.

At the last possible moment I saw my kangaroo. Di, never one to pass up a chance to meet a wombat, took me to another park on the way to the airport. There's no asbestos in Asbestos Range National Park; someone thought the local quartzite outcroppings looked like the stuff. (Di told me that of late there has been talk of changing the name to something less toxic-sounding.) The landscape there doesn't possess the rugged, spectacular beauty of the Cradle Mountain Valley, but its gentle, grassy plains and placid tea-tree wetlands have their own mellow charm. We arrived just before dusk, and creatures were wandering around everywhere, wallabies and pademelons—shy hopping marsupials less than a foot tall.

Di soon found her wombat, a big fellow in tall grass, who nibbled away for a long time, oblivious of us. Then, when I turned back to the plain behind us, I saw a Forester kangaroo, with a magnificent tail, who would have been almost as tall as I am if he stood up straight. He peered at me coolly with his glossy black eyes and then hopped away. There's something undeniably comical about the way a kangaroo hops, but when you feel the earth shudder under you with his every bound, awe creeps into your smile. I saw where he was heading: far away perhaps a hundred kangaroos were roaming in a herd on a grassy plain beside the sea, quietly having their afternoon graze. Paradoxically, the edge of the world felt close enough to touch, yet it was a comfortable, familiar place.

For more information about the tourist attractions of Australia, telephone the Australian Tourism Commission at 661-775-2000. The Tourism Tasmania Web site, at www.tourism.tas.gov.au, can supply more specific information about the island.

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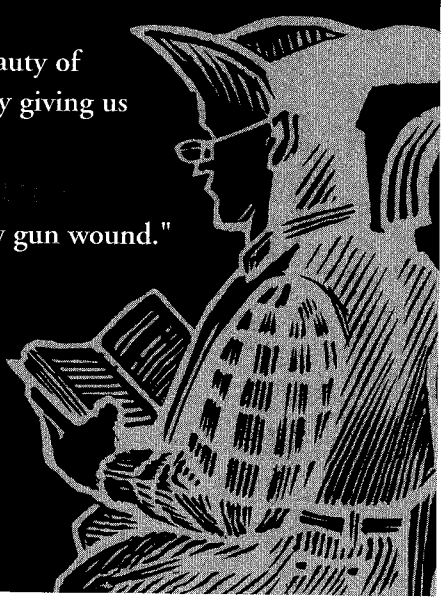

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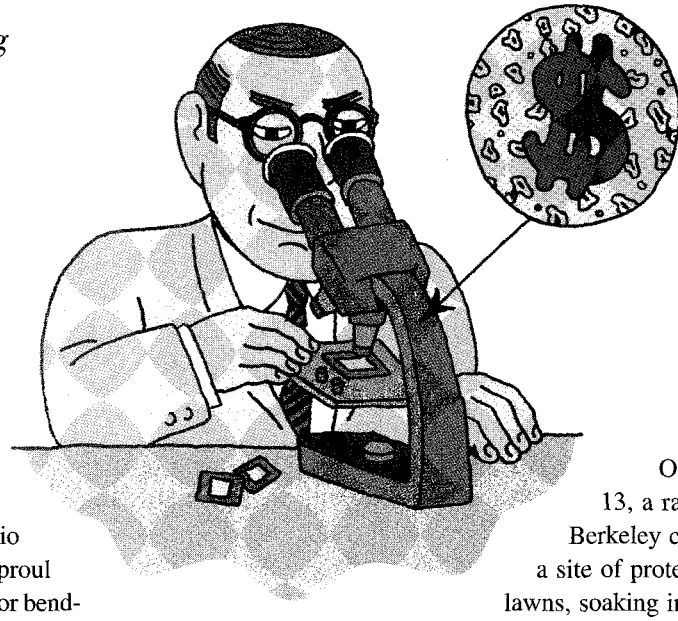
by EYAL PRESS and JENNIFER WASHBURN

Commercially sponsored research is putting at risk the paramount value of higher education—disinterested inquiry. Even more alarming, the authors argue, universities themselves are behaving more and more like for-profit companies



IN the fall of 1964 a twenty-one-year-old Berkeley undergraduate named Mario Savio climbed the steps of Sproul Hall and denounced his university for bending over backwards to "serve the need of American industry." Savio, the leader of the Berkeley Free Speech Movement, accused the university of functioning as "a factory that turns out a certain product needed by industry" rather than serving as the conscience and a critic of society. To the modern ear this sixties rhetoric may sound outdated. To many people in the academic world, however, Savio's words ring truer today than ever. Although our national conversation about higher education remains focused on issues of diversity and affirmative action, nothing provoked more debate on many college campuses last year than the growing ties between universities and business—and nowhere was the debate livelier than at Berkeley.

On the afternoon of April 13, a radiant day last spring, the Berkeley campus hardly looked like a site of protest. Students lay on green lawns, soaking in the sunshine. But inside Room 60 of Evans Hall, a concrete building on the northern edge of campus, the lights were dim and the atmosphere tense. There two dozen faculty members, many of them professors in the College of Natural Resources, had gathered to present the disquieting results of a newly released faculty survey.

The focus of the survey was a controversial agreement that Berkeley had signed in November of 1998 with Novartis, a Swiss pharmaceutical giant and producer of genetically engineered crops. Under the terms of the agreement Novartis will give Berkeley $25 million to fund basic research in the Department of Plant and Microbial Biology, one of four departments within the CNR.

Illustrations by Seymour Chwast

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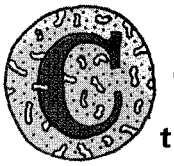
In exchange for the $25 million, Berkeley grants Novartis first right to negotiate licenses on roughly a third of the department's discoveries—including the results of research funded by state and federal sources as well as by Novartis. It also grants the company unprecedented representation—two of five seats—on the department's research committee, which determines how the money is spent.

That the university had the backing of a private company was hardly unusual. That a single corporation would be providing one third of the research budget of an entire department at a public university had sparked an uproar. Shortly after the agreement was signed, a newly formed graduate-student group, Students for Responsible Research, circulated a petition blasting the Novartis deal for standing "in direct conflict with our mission as a public university." *The Daily Californian*, Berkeley's student newspaper, published a five-part series on the growing privatization of the university, and a coalition of public-interest groups sent a letter to Berkeley's chancellor, Robert Berdahl, charging that the alliance "would disqualify a leading intellectual center from the ranks of institutions able to provide the kind of research—free from vested interest" that is the hallmark of academic life. Meanwhile, the College of Natural Resources, headed by Dean Gordon Rausser, sent a message to all professors urging them not to speak to the press and to direct any questions to the university's public-relations office. Many viewed this as a hush order.



Corporations not only sponsor a growing amount of research—they frequently dictate the terms under which it is conducted. Professors often own stock in companies that fund their work. And universities exhibit a markedly more commercial bent.

"We are here to discuss the position of the faculty," Ignacio Chapela, a professor of microbial ecology, announced as the April 13 meeting began. Chapela, who was then the chairman of the college's executive committee, a faculty governing body, snapped on an overhead projector to display the results of the survey, and declared that the Novartis deal had left the CNR "deeply divided." While 41 percent of the faculty respondents supported the Novartis agreement as signed, more than 50 percent believed that it would have a "negative" or "strongly negative" effect on academic freedom. Roughly half believed that the agreement would erode Berkeley's commitment to "public good research," and 60 percent feared that it would impede the free exchange of ideas among scientists within the college—one of Chapela's chief concerns.

"When I came to Berkeley," Chapela explained to us after the meeting, "the people who brought me here and who were my closest colleagues were largely in the Department of Plant and Microbial Biology. Now I know that anything I say to these people can be turned around and handed over to Novartis. So I just can't talk to them anymore. If I have a good idea, I'm not going to just give it away." Chapela, like many critics of the deal, is hardly a confirmed opponent of university-industry relations. Before coming to Berkeley, he told us, he spent three years in Switzerland working for none other than Novartis—then named Sandoz—and he continues to have a relationship with the company. "I'm not opposed to individual professors' serving as consultants to industry," he said. "If something goes wrong, it's their reputation that's at stake. But this is different. This deal institutionalizes the university's relationship with one company, whose interest is profit. Our role should be to serve the public good."

THE ACADEMIC-INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX

GORDON Rausser, the chief architect of the Novartis deal, believes that faculty concerns about the alliance reflect ignorance about both the Novartis deal and the changing economic realities of higher education. When we met with Rausser last year, in his spacious office in the ornate neoclassical Giannini Hall, he insisted that the deal, far from violating Berkeley's public mission, would help to perpetuate the university's status as a top-flight research institution. An economist who served on the President's Council of Economic Advisors in the 1980s and now operates a sideline consulting business, Rausser contends that Berkeley's value is "enhanced, not diminished, when we work creatively in collaboration with other institutions, including private companies." In a recent article in the Berkeley alumni magazine Rausser argues, "Without modern laboratory facilities and access to commercially developed proprietary databases . . . we can neither provide first-rate graduate education nor perform the fundamental research that is part of the University's mission."

Rausser's view is more and more the norm, as academic administrators throughout the country turn to the private sector for an increasing percentage of their research dollars, in part because public support for education has been dropping. Although the federal government still supplies most of the funding for academic research (it provided $14.3 billion, or 60 percent, in 1997, the latest year for which figures are available), the rate of growth in federal support has fallen steadily over the past twelve years, as the cost of doing research, particularly in the cutting-edge fields of computer engineering and molecular biology, has risen sharply. State spending has also declined. Berkeley Chancellor Robert Berdahl says that

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California now supplies just 34 percent of Berkeley's overall budget, as compared with 50 percent twelve years ago, and he claims that other state universities have suffered similar cuts.

Meanwhile, corporate giving is on the rise, growing from $850 million in 1985 to $4.25 billion less than a decade later—and increasingly the money comes with strings attached. One marked trend is a boom in industry-endowed chairs. Kmart has endowed a chair in the management school at West Virginia University which requires its holder to spend up to thirty days a year training assistant store managers. Freeport McMoRan, a mining company embroiled in allegations of environmental misconduct in Indonesia, has created a chair in environmental studies at Tulane. In its series on privatization at Berkeley, *The Daily Californian* noted that buildings throughout the Haas School of Business were "plastered with corporate logos." One major contributor to the school is Don Fisher, the owner of The Gap, whose company also happens to be featured as a case study in an introductory business-administration course. Laura D'Andrea Tyson, formerly one of President Clinton's top economic advisers, is now officially known as the BankAmerica Dean of Haas.

In rushing to forge alliances with industry, universities are not just responding to economic necessity—they are also capitalizing on a change in federal law, implemented nearly two decades ago, that laid the foundation for today's academic-industrial complex. In 1980 concerns about declining U.S. productivity and rising competition from Japan propelled Congress to pass the Bayh-Dole Act, which for the first time allowed universities to patent the results of federally funded research. The goal of the legislation was to bring ideas out of the ivory tower and into the marketplace, by offering universities the opportunity to license campus-based inventions to U.S. companies, earning royalties in return. Both the government and the business world saw universities not merely as centers of learning and basic research but as sources of commercially valuable ideas, which is why the Business–Higher Education Forum, a coalition of corporate and academic leaders, and similar groups lobbied to tear down the walls separating universities from the marketplace. In the years since, Congress has passed numerous other laws to bolster university-industry ties, including generous tax breaks for corporations willing to invest in academic research.

The Bayh-Dole Act was from the beginning controversial. Some in Congress argued that granting private companies the rights to publicly funded research amounted to an enormous giveaway to corporations; others pronounced the act a visionary example of industrial policy that would help America compete in the fast-moving information age. What is undeniable is that Bayh-Dole has revolutionized university-industry relations. From 1980 to 1998 industry funding for academic research expanded at an annual rate of 8.1 percent, reaching $1.9 billion in 1997—nearly eight times the level of twenty years ago. Before Bayh-Dole, universities produced roughly 250 patents a year (many of which were never commercialized); in fiscal year 1998, however, universities generated more than 4,800 patent applications. University-industry collaborations, Rausser argues, have brought important new products—anti-AIDS treatments, cancer drugs—to market, and have spurred America's booming biotech and computing industries. "The University of California alone has issued over five hundred patents since Bayh-Dole," Rausser says.

This is a powerful argument, but a troubling one. In an age when ideas are central to the economy, universities will inevitably play a role in fostering growth. But should we allow commercial forces to determine the university's educational mission and academic ideals? In higher education today corporations not only sponsor a growing amount of research—they frequently dictate the terms under which it is conducted. Professors, their image as unbiased truth-seekers notwithstanding, often own stock in the companies that fund their work. And universities themselves are exhibiting a markedly more commercial bent. Most now operate technology-licensing offices to manage their patent portfolios, often guarding their intellectual property as aggressively as any business would. Schools with limited budgets are pouring money into commercially oriented fields of research, while downsizing humanities departments and curbing expenditures on teaching. Occasional reports on these developments, including a recent *60 Minutes* segment on corporate-sponsored research, have begun to surface beyond the university. But the larger picture has yet to be filled out. It is this: universities, once wary beneficiaries of corporate largesse, have become eager co-capitalists, embracing market values as never before.

SECRECY AND SCIENCE

In a classic paper published in 1942, the sociologist Robert K. Merton likened the culture of science more to the ideals of communism than to capitalism, because intellectual property was commonly shared and discoveries were freely exchanged. "The scientist's claim to 'his' intellectual 'property,'" Merton wrote, was "limited to that of recognition and esteem," and scientific knowledge was assumed to be a public good.

Today scientists who perform industry-sponsored research routinely sign agreements requiring them to keep both the methods and the results of their work secret for a certain period of time. From a company's point of view, confidentiality may be necessary to prevent potential competitors from pilfering ideas. But what constitutes a reasonable period of secrecy? The National Institutes of Health recommends that universities allow corporate sponsors to prohibit publication for no more than one or two months (the amount of time ordinarily necessary to apply for a patent), but lengthier delays are becoming standard. Berkeley's contract with Novartis, for example, allows the company to postpone publication for up to four months. A survey of 210 life-science companies, conducted in 1994 by researchers at Massachusetts General Hospital, found that 58 percent of those sponsoring academic research

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require delays of more than six months before publication.

"One of the most basic tenets of science is that we share information in an open way," says Steven Rosenberg, of the National Cancer Institute, who is among the country's leading cancer researchers. "As biotech and pharmaceutical companies have become more involved in funding research, there's been a shift toward confidentiality that is severely inhibiting the interchange of information." A few years ago Rosenberg confronted this problem firsthand when he tried to obtain information on safe-dosage levels for a reagent he sought to use in a clinical trial involving an experimental cancer treatment. The company asked Rosenberg to sign a confidentiality agreement, and when he refused, they withheld the information. Rosenberg has become so alarmed about secrecy that he now urges all scientists and research institutions to reject confidentiality restrictions on principle. Few have heeded his call. A 1997 survey of 2,167 university scientists, which appeared in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, revealed that nearly one in five had delayed publication for more than six months to protect proprietary information—and this was the number that *admitted* to delay. "The ethics of business and the ethics of science do not mix well," Rosenberg says. "This is the real dark side of science."

Nelson Kiang, a professor emeritus at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and at Harvard, who recently organized an MIT conference on "Secrecy in Science," worries in particular that students, rather than learning proper scientific protocol, are being taught to accept the inhibiting power of money over science. "One hears of many students at MIT who complain about not being able to publish their theses in a timely fashion," Kiang says, "but when we tried to involve them in the conference, not a single one would come forward, and they actually asked us specifically not to be named. Of course, it's not surprising. They fear that if they come forward, they might get into trouble with their supervisors."

Worse than the problems of enforced secrecy and delay, however, is the possibility that behind closed doors some corporate sponsors are manipulating manuscripts before publication to serve their commercial interests. In the summer of 1996 four researchers working on a study of calcium channel blockers—frequently prescribed for high blood pressure—quit in protest after their sponsor, Sandoz, removed passages from a draft manuscript highlighting the drugs' potential dangers, which include stroke and heart failure. The researchers aired their concerns in a letter to the *Journal of the American Medical Association*: "We believed that the sponsor . . . was attempting to wield undue influence on the nature of the final paper. This effort was so oppressive that we felt it inhibited academic freedom." Such meddling, though generally difficult to document, may well be common. A study of major research centers in the field of engineering found that 35 percent would allow corporate sponsors to delete information from papers prior to publication.

This past May, at a meeting of the American Association of University Professors, in Boston, a group of academics gathered to discuss the growing corporate threat to academic freedom—and the apparent reluctance of universities to defend it. Among those present was David Kern, formerly the director of occupational medicine at Brown University's Memorial Hospital. In 1996, while serving as a consultant to Microfibres, a Rhode Island company that produces nylon flock, Kern discovered evidence of a serious new lung disease among the company's employees. Upon learning that he planned to publish his findings, the company threatened to sue, citing a confidentiality agreement that forbade Kern to expose "trade secrets." The information that Kern had gathered had come from tests on volunteers, and concerned not proprietary secrets but a serious threat to public health. Yet Brown University, too, tried to dissuade Kern from publishing, warning that the company might file suit. Outraged, Kern published anyway, and in 1997 the Centers for Disease Control officially recognized the new disease, flock worker's lung. Although Microfibres never did file suit, Kern's position at Brown was eliminated. "Universities should protect their faculty from any efforts to encroach on academic freedom," Kern says. "Unfortunately, with so much corporate money flooding into academia, that's not happening." At the AAUP conference several professors shared similar experiences, and these may only hint at the scope of the problem.

Mildred Cho, a senior research scholar at Stanford's Center for Biomedical Ethics, warns that for every David Kern who steps forward in such cases, an unknown number of researchers voluntarily toe the company line. "When you have so many scientists on boards of companies or doing sponsored research," Cho explains, "you start to wonder, How are these studies being designed? What kinds of research questions are being raised? What kinds aren't being raised?" In a 1996 study published in the *Annals of Internal Medicine*, Cho found that 98 percent of papers based on industry-sponsored research reflected favorably on the drugs being examined, as compared with 79 percent of papers based on research not funded by industry. More recently, an analysis published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* found that studies of cancer drugs funded by pharmaceutical companies were roughly one eighth as likely to reach unfavorable conclusions as nonprofit-funded studies. Might the public begin to see academics less as stewards of truth than as hired hands?

Or worse than hired hands: interested parties. More and more, professors not only accept industry grants to perform research but also hold stock or have other financial ties to the companies funding them. In a study of 800 scientific papers published in a range of academic journals, Sheldon Krimsky, a professor of public policy at Tufts University and a leading authority on conflicts of interest, found that slightly more than *a third* of the authors had a significant financial interest in their reports. Michael McCarthy, an editor at the British medical journal *The Lancet*, says such links are now so common that he "often can't find anyone who doesn't have a financial

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This is the divot
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Who recently learned how to play golf
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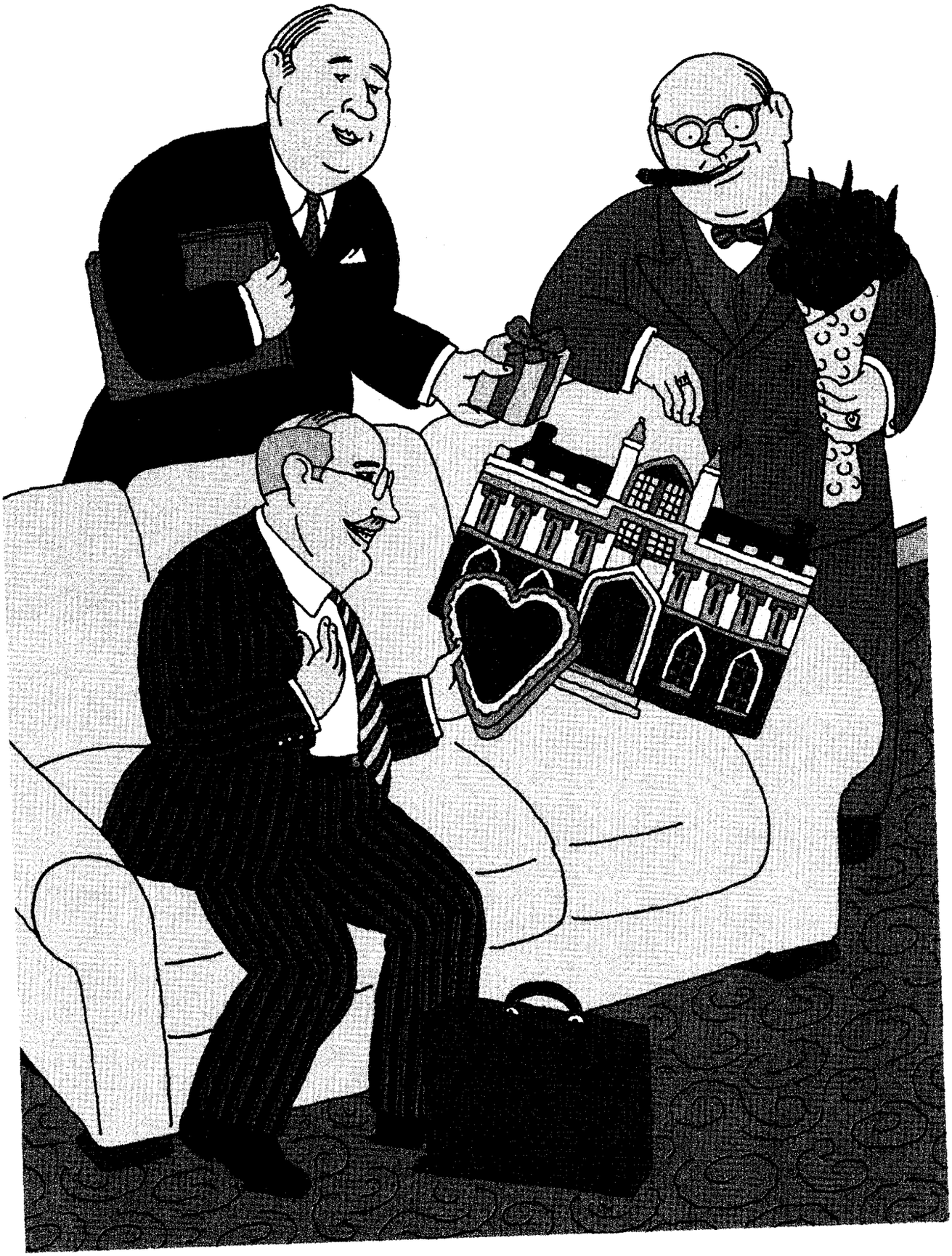

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interest" in a drug or therapy the journal would like to review. Although Krimsky doesn't believe that the mere existence of such ties makes an academic study suspect, he advocates full disclosure. Yet in none of the nearly 300 studies in which Krimsky found a conflict of interest were readers informed about it.

The Securities and Exchange Commission has also detected this trend and is now investigating numerous academic researchers suspected of engaging in insider trading. In a case filed recently in Pennsylvania, the SEC charged Dale J. Lange, a Columbia University neurologist, with pocketing $26,000 in profits after Lange bought stock in a company that was about to release promising new findings concerning a drug to treat Lou Gehrig's disease. Lange expected the stock to soar because he had conducted the confidential clinical trials.

The growing concern about potential conflicts of interest has prompted some universities to forbid professors to perform sponsored research for companies in which they hold equity. The federal government is also taking steps. In 1996 the Public Health Service issued guidelines that require all academic researchers to report it to their schools if they have received payments of more than $10,000 from a company or if they hold at least five percent of its stock. At most universities, however, such information is kept private, which means that frequently neither journal editors nor academic peers know who has ties to industry and who hasn't.

More than a year before fen-phen, the appetite suppressant, was pulled off the market because it seemed to be implicated in a number of deaths, a group of researchers published a study in *The New England Journal of Medicine* warning that drugs like fen-phen could have potentially fatal side effects. But the same issue contained a commentary from two academic researchers that downplayed the health dangers of fen-phen. Both authors had served as paid consultants to the manufacturers and distributors of similar drugs—connections that were not mentioned. "I was outraged when I saw that," Stuart Rich, a professor at Rush Medical College, told the *Chronicle of Higher Education* when the ties were exposed. "The study was the only scientific study that said these diet pills kill people." Like universities, some journals have begun requiring academic contributors to disclose corporate financial ties. But in a study released last year Sheldon Krimsky and another researcher examined 62,000 articles and found that these ties were disclosed in only 0.5 percent of them.

Corporate underwriting of research is by no means confined to the medical sciences. In his book *The Heat Is On: The High Stakes Battle Over Earth's Threatened Climate* (1997), Ross Gelbspan documents how, over the past several years, fossil-fuel companies have bankrolled numerous academic studies that downplay the threat of global warming—distorting, Gelbspan argues, the public-policy debate. And last June controversy erupted at the University of Florida following the disclosure that Charles Thomas, a criminologist at the school who advised the state on prison policy, had pocketed $3 million in consulting fees from the private-prison industry, in which he also owned stock. (Thomas's views on private prisons are quoted frequently in *The Wall Street Journal* and *The New York Times*, and he has trumpeted the virtues of "full-scale privatization" in testimony before Congress.) "I'm really kind of astounded that the state university system would tolerate something like this," said a member of the state ethics commission, which slapped Thomas with a $20,000 fine.

SOME would argue that such relationships, far from being unseemly, are in keeping with the utilitarian strain that runs through the history of American higher education. Certainly, in comparison with their European counterparts, U.S. universities have always displayed a pragmatic bent. Whereas in Europe universities took pride in pursuing knowledge for its own sake and in remaining aloof from the outside world, in America educators from Thomas Jefferson to John Dewey have argued that universities ought to be engaged in the world, and that knowledge exists to be put to use. When Congress passed the Morrill Act, in 1862 (which gave rise to America's public land-grant universities, including Berkeley), it specifically instructed the states to establish schools that would teach "agriculture and the mechanical arts . . . in order to promote the liberal and practical education of the industrial classes," rather than the classical curriculum.

Traditionally, universities regarded proprietary claims as fundamentally at odds with their obligation to disseminate knowledge as broadly as possible. Today nearly every research university in the country has a technology-licensing office, and some have gone further.

Thus it is hardly surprising that, as the historian David Noble documents in his book *America by Design* (1977), the rapid growth of the U.S. industrial economy at the turn of the century coincided with a surge in university-industry collaboration. Engineering and chemical giants underwrote research in exchange for the services of academic scientists; universities established industrial-research centers to furnish corporations with personnel; some schools even went into business themselves, with the University of Minnesota operating its own mine and New York University running a macaroni factory. Such entanglements inspired the radical economist Thorstein Veblen to comment acerbically in 1908 that "business principles" were transforming higher education into "a

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merchantable commodity, to be produced on a piece-rate plan, rated, bought, and sold by standard units, measured, counted and reduced to staple equivalence by impersonal, mechanical tests."

World War II, however, ushered in an era of public support for higher education. The role of university scientists in the Manhattan Project and other wartime initiatives—such as the development of penicillin and streptomycin—convinced public officials that academics were uniquely capable of undertaking crucial research initiatives. As corporations slowed their funding of academic research, public money filled the role: from 1953 to 1968 public support grew by 12 to 14 percent annually. Whereas funding for scientific research from all sources totaled $31 million in 1940, federal funding alone reached $3 billion in 1979, much of it dispensed by the National Institutes of Health and other new agencies. This influx of federal dollars reflected a growing appreciation for the basic, undirected research that universities perform. "New products and new processes do not appear full-grown," Vannevar Bush, President Franklin Roosevelt's chief science adviser, declared in 1944. "They are founded on new principles and new conceptions, which in turn are painstakingly developed by research in the purest realms of science."

The Bayh-Dole Act changed this, and not simply by creating incentives for corporations to invest in academic research. What is ultimately most striking about today's academic-industrial complex is not that large amounts of private capital are flowing into universities. It is that universities themselves are beginning to look and behave like for-profit companies.

THE UNIVERSITY AS BUSINESS

THE Office of Technology Licensing at Stanford University occupies the third floor of a drab concrete building located just off the main loop that circles the palm-studded Palo Alto campus. This unprepossessing spot is the hub of a commercial enterprise that is the envy of universities across the country. The OTL's mission is to commercialize discoveries made by professors and to manage Stanford's growing patent portfolio. In the main lobby, encased in handsome wooden frames along the walls, are displays highlighting the various patents and products the office has recently helped bring to market. One describes a valve that creates high-resolution images on the surface of a silicon chip, another a new case-management system for heart failure that the university is hoping to license to the nation's hospitals.

"We're receiving about two hundred and fifty invention disclosures a year, roughly one in four of which is patented," says Jon Sandelin, a senior associate at the OTL. Sandelin says that Stanford earned $61 million from its technology-transfer activity last year—a success he credits to creating the right entrepreneurial environment. "You have to understand—initially the department chairmen and school deans weren't thrilled by having this new activity that was diverting the attention of their faculty away from teaching and research," he explains. "So how do you offset that? You make them stakeholders—you make them beneficiaries."

Once professors and their departments learned that they could earn a cut from inventions, Sandelin says, they became more enthusiastic about bringing their ideas to the OTL. To reinforce the message, the OTL conducts aggressive outreach, organizing lunches with department heads; publishing a newsletter, *Brainstorm*, that touts the latest faculty discoveries; and dangling incentives in front of would-be inventors. In 1990 Stanford established a Research Incentive Fund to help professors convert academic concepts into "prototype products." "Got an idea for the next great whatchmacallit but don't have the funds to move from hypothesis to thesis?" a recent issue of *Brainstorm* asks. "This fund might just be your answer."

Traditionally, universities regarded patents as being outside their orbit, generally believing that proprietary claims were fundamentally at odds with their obligation to disseminate knowledge as broadly as possible. Today nearly every research university in the country has a technology-licensing office, and some have gone further. Johns Hopkins Medical School, for example, has established an internal venture-capital fund to bankroll commercially promising lines of research. The University of Chicago, renowned for its classical tradition, has created an affiliated non-profit, the ARCH Development Corporation, whose mission, in part, is to launch start-up companies based on faculty innovations. The dean of Chicago's medical school, Glenn D. Steele Jr., recently removed many faculty department heads and bluntly told *Business Week* that he plans to begin "insinuating the place . . . with entrepreneurial people"—a clear statement that commercial acumen is becoming an important qualification for new faculty.

SURPRISINGLY, two decades after Bayh-Dole was passed, no independent assessments of its economic impact have been made. But the Association of University Technology Managers, a consortium of over 300 universities and research institutions that engage in technology transfer, does publish an annual statistical survey of its members. In 1998 alone, the AUTM reports, 364 start-up companies were formed on the basis of a license to an academic invention, bringing the total since 1980 to 2,578. The group estimates that overall, university technology-transfer activities generated $34 billion that year, supporting 280,000 American jobs.

"There's clearly a kind of ferment going on at U.S. universities," says Lita Nelsen, the director of technology licensing at MIT. "When I went to MIT as an undergraduate, in 1964, the Kendall Square area was a bunch of vacant lots with a greasy old diner, and that was it. Now if you look out my window, it's brick high-rise buildings filled with little start-up companies—everything from Lotus down the street, to Neurometrics across the alley, to Biogen and Sapient. The old mills with broken

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windows have been refurbished into high-tech incubators." The clustering of computer-engineering and biotech firms around academic-research centers in Silicon Valley; Austin, Texas; Route 128 in Massachusetts; and the Research Triangle, in North Carolina, derives in large measure from the synergy between universities and industry that Bayh-Dole has fostered.

No sector of the economy better illustrates the potential benefits of this synergy than biotechnology, a multibillion-dollar industry that grew out of university research labs. Garry Nolan, an assistant professor of molecular pharmacology at Stanford, epitomizes the new generation of professor-entrepreneurs. A few years ago Nolan founded Rigel, a biotech firm based in San Francisco that has pioneered a promising new method for identifying the proteins involved in asthma, allergies, immune disorders, and other health problems. "We've already attracted a hundred and fifty million dollars in investment from various drug companies interested in our work," Nolan says. "There's almost no greater and more immediate feedback than when you find a commercial entity interested in what you're doing."

Walter Powell, a sociologist at the University of Arizona who has tracked the growth of the biotech industry worldwide, believes that the close links between universities and industry are a principal reason why U.S. firms now dominate the biotech market—a lesson America's competitors are taking to heart. "You're seeing other countries moving in the same direction," Powell says, pointing out that the University of Munich has been involved in spinning off at least five private companies in Germany in the last two years alone. Lita Nelsen says her office at MIT has been overrun with visitors from other countries, including Japan, which recently passed its own version of the Bayh-Dole Act.

The surprising twist, however, is that although university licensing offices are churning out patents, most of these offices are themselves barely breaking even. "Everybody was waiting for a hundred million dollars a year out of their technology-transfer offices," Nelsen says. "The reality is that hardly any schools earn anywhere near that." Although some academic achievements—such as the discovery of recombinant DNA and the development of the hepatitis B vaccine (developed jointly at the University of California and the University of Washington)—have generated millions, most have not, and Nelsen says it is impossible to predict which will be lucrative.

Far from restraining universities, however, the difficulty of turning a profit seems to have made them more aggressive. A growing number of schools, for example, are buying equity stakes in the very companies that stand to profit from their faculties' research—a practice that both raises the potential for conflict of interest and is financially risky. In the 1980s and early 1990s Boston University poured $85 million (nearly a fifth of its endowment) into Seragen, a biotech firm specializing in cancer research, which several BU professors had founded. Convinced that the company would generate windfall profits, BU President John Silber also personally invested heavily in Seragen and persuaded numerous professors and trustees to do likewise. But from 1991 to 1997 Seragen lost almost $150 million. The university, which at one point owned 91 percent of the company's stock, was accused of egregiously mismanaging the school's endowment to prop up the company and to protect the trustees' investments.

Might such a cautionary tale dissuade other universities from going down the same road? To the contrary: the University of California recently established a policy allowing it to acquire equity stakes in start-ups and now owns shares in thirty companies committed to developing UC technologies. Stanford took a similar step in 1994.

Jesse Reynolds, a leading member of Students for Responsible Research, commented on a major drug-company deal with Berkeley: "When the best state agricultural college in the country makes this kind of leap, the world is bound to follow. I really fear that."

Meanwhile, universities are devising increasingly creative—and controversial—ways to raise their royalty earnings. Michigan State University, for example, recently took the unusual step of applying for a new, slightly altered patent on a widely prescribed cancer drug, cisplatin, that was patented by the university in 1979. Filing twice on the same invention is prohibited, but MSU's original patent, which along with its analog, carboplatin, generated $160 million in royalties, was about to expire. Thus the slight alteration. The move may have been good for MSU's bottom line, but did it serve the public interest? MSU's action prevented four generic-drug manufacturers from marketing a cheaper version of cisplatin, and these companies are now suing MSU—all of which prompted Barnett Rosenberg, the drug's developer and a now-retired professor, to complain that his work has "led to the creation of a lot of selfish, money-hungry university personnel."

Stanford has advanced beyond mere patenting. The university recently invested more than $1 million to develop its own brand-name product, Sondius-XG, a sound-synthesis technology that it will market in conjunction with Yamaha. Why? Because unlike patents, which expire after twenty years, brands generate revenue forever. Mary Watanabe, who works with Jon Sandelin at the Office of Technology Licensing, let slip during an interview that the university is also considering launching a "Stanford company." She declined to divulge details.

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If these activities appear to be out of keeping with the university's nonprofit educational mission, that's because they are. In a provocative 1996 article in the *University of Pennsylvania Law Review*, Peter Blumberg, then a law student, argued that technology-transfer activity at universities is so far removed from the university's public mission that it "could be treated as unrelated business income for tax purposes." Universities, Blumberg writes, "enjoy their tax exemption because of a belief that they are producing research that no other market actor would produce absent a public subsidy; basic research, publishable research, research that educates students and . . . is usable by the whole society."

In their zeal to maximize revenue, many schools are not only raising questions about their nonprofit status—they are getting into some embarrassing skirmishes with their own students and professors over the rights to potentially lucrative ideas. In the most extraordinary case to date Petr Taborsky, a student at the University of South Florida, wound up on the chain gang of a maximum-security state prison after colliding with his university over the rights to a discovery he made as an undergraduate. Taborsky had been working as a research assistant on a project sponsored by the Florida Progress Corporation, a local holding company. At the end of the sponsored research period, Taborsky claims, he received permission from Robert Carnahan, a dean in the College of Engineering, to begin work on his own experiments, following a different approach, which he hoped to use as the basis for a master's thesis. But as soon as Taborsky made his research breakthrough, which had obvious commercial utility as a way to remove ammonia from wastewater, Florida Progress and USF both laid claim to his discovery. The university filed criminal charges against Taborsky and spent more than ten times the amount of the original research grant on outside legal counsel alone. In 1990 a jury found Taborsky guilty of stealing university property, and the State of Florida required him to begin serving his sentence on a chain gang in 1996. But the case became an embarrassing media spectacle, and Governor Lawton Chiles soon intervened to offer Taborsky clemency, which Taborsky, on principle, refused.

The proliferation of ownership claims threatens also to impede economic growth. One expert warns that if current trends continue, "creators will be prevented from creating," as the public domain is "converted into a fallow landscape of walled private plots."

Why would a state university go to such lengths? To protect future investments, of course. As Seth Shulman argues in *Owning the Future*, a new book about intellectual property in the information age, the Taborsky case "underscores what can happen when universities, beholden to industry for an increasing share of research dollars, let financial concerns overshadow the notion of research as a shared intellectual pursuit."

Today it is common for universities to pay exorbitant legal fees to defend their intellectual property. According to the Association of University Technology Managers annual report, dozens of major universities—Brandeis, West Virginia, Tufts, and Miami among them—actually spent more on legal fees in fiscal year 1997 than they earned from all licensing and patenting activity that year. A growing number of disputes pit universities against their own faculty members. In 1996 a jury awarded $2.3 million to two professors, Jerome Singer and Lawrence Crooks, who filed suit against the University of California for shortchanging them on royalties resulting from their pathbreaking research on magnetic resonance imaging, a widely utilized medical test known as the MRI. An appeals court found that the university improperly sheltered revenue by dramatically discounting the patents it licensed to manufacturers in exchange for more than $20 million in research funding.

Is this where the Bayh-Dole Act was supposed to lead? Two summers ago a working group at the National Institutes of Health issued a report to the NIH director, Harold Varmus, warning that changes in the way universities guard their intellectual property are endangering the free exchange of basic research tools—such as gene sequences and reagents—that are crucial to all research. The NIH found that the terms universities impose on their research tools, through their technology-licensing offices, "present just about every type of clause that universities cite as problematic in the [contracts] . . . they receive from industry." These include requirements that universities be allowed to review manuscripts prior to publication and provisions extending their ownership claims to any future discoveries deriving from use of their research materials. Universities, the NIH charges, "have no duty to return value to shareholders, and their principal obligation under the Bayh-Dole Act is to promote utilization, not to maximize financial returns. It hardly seems consistent with the purposes of the Bayh-Dole Act to impose proprietary restrictions on research tools that would be widely utilized if freely disseminated. Technology transfer need not be a revenue source to be successful." Ironically, the proliferation of ownership claims threatens not only to stifle the free exchange of ideas but also to impede economic growth. James Boyle, an expert on intellectual-property law at American University, warns that if current trends continue, "creators will be prevented from creating," as the public domain is "converted into a fallow landscape of walled private plots."

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CONTROLLING THE RESEARCH AGENDA

IMMEDIATELY after the April faculty meeting at Berkeley several members of Students for Responsible Research gathered in an outdoor courtyard at La Burrita, a pub just off campus, to air their concerns about the Novartis deal—and to let off steam. "This place has some of the cheapest pitchers around," said Jesse Reynolds, one of the group's leaders, as glasses were poured and beers were passed around a long picnic table.

Unlike the student radicals of the sixties, these students never intended to lock horns with the university establishment. Reynolds, who studies California water resources, says he's relatively new to student politics—and to politics altogether. "I'm generally one of those people who gripe a lot and do nothing," he explained. "But when the best state agricultural college in the country makes this kind of leap, the world is bound to follow. I really fear that."

David Quist, a second-year graduate student in environmental science, laughed as he told a story illustrating the culture that now permeates the university. The previous October, Quist said, at a town-hall meeting where the Novartis deal was first made public, Dean Gordon Rausser invited concerned students to examine the contract for themselves. "So the next day I came to his office," Quist recalled. "I was given some materials and sat down to take notes. But as soon as an administrator saw me, she said, 'Oh, no, you can't do that.'" Quist's notes were confiscated and held at the dean's office for several months.

Wilhelm Gruissem, a professor in the Department of Plant and Microbial Biology who helped to negotiate the Novartis deal, insists that the negotiations were as open as possible without divulging the company's proprietary secrets. But even students within the department felt shut out. In December of 1998 twenty-three graduate students sent a letter to the faculty complaining that their views had never been solicited and that they had been "forced to rely on rumors and supposition throughout the negotiation process."

What most concerns the Students for Responsible Research is that as university-industry ties grow more intimate, less commercially oriented areas of science will languish. "Let's say you're a graduate student interested in sustainable agriculture or biological control or some other area that is not commercial," Reynolds explained. "My guess is you're not going to come to Berkeley, or you'll at least think twice about it."

Donald Dahlsten, the associate dean of the College of Natural Resources, shares this concern. "Molecular biology and genetic engineering have clearly risen as the preferred approach to solving our problems, and that's where the resources are going," Dahlsten says. "New buildings have gone up, and these departments are expanding, while the organismic areas of science—which emphasize a more ecological approach—are being downsized." Dahlsten once chaired Berkeley's world-renowned Division of Biological Control. Today that division, along with the Department of Plant Pathology and more than half of all faculty positions in entomology, are gone—in part, many professors believe, because there are no profits in such work. "You can't patent the natural organisms and ecological understanding used in biological control," Andy Gutierrez, a Berkeley entomologist, explains. "However, if you look at public benefit, that division provided billions of dollars annually to the state of California and the world." In one project Gutierrez worked on, he helped to halt the spread of a pest that threatened to destroy the cassava crop, a food staple for 200 million people in West Africa.

Gordon Rausser counters that far from draining resources from other areas, the Novartis deal will benefit the college as a whole, because a quarter of the money will be spent outside the Department of Plant and Microbial Biology. "I'm sitting here with three science buildings that were built in the 1920s, thirties, and forties," Rausser says. "I can't get those buildings modernized for first-rate research without resources."

Chris Scott, who until recently oversaw industry collaborations at Stanford's medical school, describes another reason that working with the private sector is essential. Scott points out that for the past several years industry researchers have consistently been ranked among the most frequently cited scientific authors, making academic isolation intellectually deleterious. But Scott, too, recognizes the danger of allowing market criteria to dictate the paths of scientific inquiry. "Show me an industry-sponsored research project on schistomiasis—a liver parasite that afflicts people in the Third World—or malaria or river blindness or dengue fever," Scott says. All these diseases primarily afflict people in developing nations who can't afford to pay high prices for medicine, he says, so all have been dropped from the pharmaceutical industry's docket. Mildred Cho, of Stanford's Center for Biomedical Ethics, agrees, pointing to vaccine research as another neglected area. "Public-health services simply can't afford to pay high prices," Cho says. "If research is market-driven, it raises potential problems not only for the research agenda but for public health."

As the research agendas of universities and corporations merge, there is one other danger: namely, that universities will cease to serve as places where independent critical thought is nurtured. Anne Kapuscinski, a visiting professor from the University of Minnesota who studies genetically engineered organisms, and other scholars we met with at Berkeley fear that raising questions about the safety of genetically altered crops—a principal research focus of Novartis—may prove difficult if more and more agricultural colleges turn to corporations to finance their research. Concerns about genetic engineering are mounting, Kapuscinski notes. A study published last May in *Nature* found that the toxins dispersed from the pollen of Bt (*Bacillus thuringiensis*) corn, a Novartis product, can kill nonpest insects, including the monarch butterfly—a problem with potentially enormous ecological implications. Such dangers prompted the Food and Drug Administration to convene a series of public hearings last November on geneti-

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cally altered crops, whose use has provoked huge demonstrations in Europe and elsewhere. Ignacio Chapela, of the College of Natural Resources' executive committee, believes that the most important thing Novartis stands to gain from the alliance is legitimacy. "The sheer value of having the logo of the University of California next to the logo of Novartis is immensely valuable to the company right now," he says.

Maybe so—but the plan may end up backfiring. At last year's graduation ceremony, in a graphic display of dissent, a student speaker placed the blue-and-orange Novartis logo directly above Berkeley's, while a hundred students in the audience mockingly donned graduation caps emblazoned with the Novartis logo—hardly the public exposure the company sought.

DOWNSIZING THE HUMANITIES

THE students at Berkeley were not the only ones protesting the growing corporate influence on university research last spring. In March of 1998 students at dozens of schools, including the University of Wisconsin, Harvard, and Cornell, held a series of teach-ins on the subject. At George Mason University, a state school in Fairfax County, Virginia, another graduation protest erupted as hundreds of students attached bright pink buttons bearing the slogan "Stop Dis-Engaging Our Future" to their caps and gowns. The buttons, which were distributed by Students for Quality Education, were a pointed reference to a recent George Mason mission statement, "Engaging the Future," which calls for increasing investment in information technology and tightening relations between the university and northern Virginia's booming technology industry.

In 1998 James S. Gilmore, the governor of Virginia, promised to increase state funds for GMU by as much as $25 million a year provided that the university better serve the region's high-tech businesses. GMU's president, Alan G. Merten, a computer scientist and a former dean of the business school at Cornell, hardly needed urging. "We must accept that we have a new mandate, and a new reason for being in existence," he announced at the World Congress on Information Technology, a gathering of industry executives hosted by GMU in the summer of 1998. "The mandate is to be *networked*." By year's end Merten had added degree programs in information technology and computer science, poured money into the 125-acre Prince William campus, whose focus is biosciences, bioinformatics, biotechnology, and computer and information technology, and suggested that all students would be trained to pass a "technology literacy" test. Amid this whirlwind of change, however, other areas fared less well. Degree programs in classics, German, Russian, and several other humanities departments were eliminated.

In defending the changes, Merten speaks as a realist—and, it's impossible not to notice, as someone versed in the language of the business world. "There was a time when universities weren't held accountable for much—people just threw money at them," he says. Today "people with money are more likely to give you money if you have restructured and repositioned yourself, got rid of stuff that you don't need to have. They take a very dim view of giving you money to run an inefficient organization." The process of making GMU more efficient was, he concedes, "a little bloody at times," but there was a logic to it. "We have a commitment to produce people who are employable in today's technology work force," he says. Students at GMU are "good consumers" who want degrees in areas where there are robust job opportunities, and the university has an obligation to cater to that demand.

Initially the department chairmen and school deans weren't thrilled by having this new activity that was diverting the attention of their faculty away from teaching and research," says one university official. "So how do you offset that? You make them stakeholders."

But should meeting the demand come at the expense of providing a well-rounded education? In response to GMU's cuts in the humanities 1,700 students signed a petition of protest. In addition, 180 professors in the College of Arts and Sciences sent a letter to President Merten arguing that although training students for the job market was a legitimate goal, "precisely in the face of such an emphasis on jobs and technology, it is more necessary than ever to educate students beyond technological proficiency." Kevin Avruch, a GMU anthropologist who signed the letter, explains, "A university should teach people to read and write and think critically. And my guess is that, ironically, that's what corporations really want as well. If they need to teach them Lotus, they can do that after they graduate."

Perhaps—but what happened at GMU is clearly part of a national trend. In 1995 the Board of Regents in Ohio assessed how the state's education dollars should be spent. The verdict? Eliminate funding for eight doctoral programs in history. James Engell, a professor at Harvard who has chaired that school's steering committees on degree programs in both history and literature, and Anthony Dangerfield, a former Dartmouth English professor, recently concluded a two-year national study of the state of the humanities. From 1970 to 1994, they found, the number of bachelor's degrees conferred in English, foreign languages, philosophy, and religion all declined, while there was a five- to ten-fold increase in degrees in computer and informa-

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tion sciences. The elite top quarter of Ph.D. programs in English have twenty-nine fewer students per program than they had in 1975. Meanwhile, humanities professors on average earn substantially less than their counterparts in other fields, and the gap has widened over the past twenty years.

"Test what you will—majors, salaries, graduate programs . . . the results come back the same," Engell and Dangerfield write in a lengthy recent article in the Harvard alumni magazine. "Since the late 1960s the humanities have been neglected, downgraded, and forced to retrench, all as other areas of higher education have grown in numbers, wealth, and influence." The authors trace this to what they call the new "Market-Model University," in which subjects that make money, study money, or attract money are given priority.

Even small liberal-arts colleges are responding to market demand. At the Claremont Colleges, in southern California, a cluster of schools that includes Pomona and Harvey Mudd, a new graduate institute has been launched that features "a curriculum focused on the needs of the industrial sector," a faculty without tenure, and an educational mandate to train students for "professional careers in emerging fields at the intersection of life sciences and engineering."

Surprisingly, such developments have received little attention. Since the early 1980s American culture has obsessively debated the content of the Western canon—whether Shakespeare or Toni Morrison, European history or African history, should be taught to undergraduates. In the decades to come a more pressing question may be whether undergraduates are taught any meaningful literature or history at all. Kevin Avruch says that the recent restructuring at GMU brought home that lesson. "It actually united professors on the left and the right," he says. "This faculty is often characterized as overly liberal, but we discovered that in at least one sense most of us are tremendously conservative: we share a nineteenth-century view that our job is to educate well-rounded citizens."

THEHIGHERLEARNING.COM

WHILE humanities professors at some schools are battling to save their departments from being eliminated, others are discovering, much to their surprise, that university administrators have taken a sudden interest in their course material because of its potential for being marketed online. Seemingly overnight the computer revolution has transformed "courseware" into a valuable piece of "content" that can be packaged and sold on the Internet, and online-education companies are racing to collaborate with academic institutions to exploit this burgeoning market.

Berkeley recently signed a deal with America Online, the University of Colorado has teamed up with Real Education, and the Western Governors' Association has founded a "virtual university" linking more than thirty schools in twenty-two states. Michael Milken, the convicted junk-bond trader, is investing heavily in an Internet education company known as UNext.com, which recently signed deals with Columbia University and the University of Chicago.

In a time of budget shortfalls and dwindling public support for education, university administrators and politicians see online education as a way to expand on the cheap. "Just building campuses is a very expensive proposition," says E. Jeffrey Livingston, the associate commissioner for the Utah System of Higher Education. "Governors see [the virtual university] as a way to not spend as much money in the future, to meet growth." "Distance learning" is also seen as a promising new teaching tool and as a way to reach nontraditional education markets, such as part-timers and foreign students.

A growing number of professors, however, fear that electronic education is destined to transform teaching into little more than a commodity. Before a university can sell courseware online, it must first control the rights, and that means, in essence, usurping copyright from the creators of the courses—the faculty. "This is going to be one of the most important battlegrounds of the future," predicts Edward Condren, a professor of medieval literature at the University of California at Los Angeles. In June of 1994 UCLA's extension program—the largest continuing-higher-education program in the country—signed a deal granting exclusive control (including copyright) over the production and distribution of its electronic courses to OnlineLearning.net (then called The Home Education Network). Despite UCLA's much-vaunted faculty-governance structure, Condren says, there was no prior faculty consultation, and the academic senate had to wait until February of 1998 before it was permitted to see any version of the contract. "This is a public institution," Condren says angrily, "and a contract was entered into without any public announcement that bids were being sought."

In addition to being a renowned Chaucer scholar, Condren is an authority on intellectual-property law. For the past twenty-five years he has served as an expert witness in a number of high-profile court cases, and he testified for the winning side in Falwell *v.* Flynt. "In my opinion," he says, "the UCLA extension program in its electronic offerings is operating illegally. It does not have the copyright assignment from the faculty who own the rights to the courses." Indeed, professors have historically been considered the intellectual "authors," and thus the copyright holders, of their work, says David Noble, a historian at York University, in Toronto, where faculty members recently waged a successful battle to protect their copyrights from challenge. The Bayh-Dole Act allows universities to patent the intellectual discoveries of their faculty members and to share in the royalties, but controlling copyright is radically different, Condren says, because "it would undermine the legal protection that enables faculty to freely express their views without fear of censorship or appropriation of their ideas."

Professors also fear that universities will use distance learning not to enhance education but to eliminate teaching positions. It's a legitimate concern. The New School for Social Research, in New York City, now hires unemployed Ph.D.s to

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design online courses, pays them a flat fee, and then requires them to sign away copyright so that the school can assign the course as they see fit. Educause, a consortium of over 1,600 academic institutions and more than a hundred and fifty corporations, in 1994 launched a National Learning Infrastructure Initiative that produced a detailed study of what professors do, breaking down which discrete teaching functions can be automated or outsourced for "productivity enhancement." William Massy and Robert Zemsky, education scholars based at Stanford and the University of Pennsylvania respectively, argue in a recent Educause paper that universities need information technology to control their budgets. "With labor accounting for seventy percent or more of current operating cost," they assert, "there is simply no other way."

The future the professors fear has already arrived. David Noble, citing figures from the U.S. National Center for Educational Statistics, notes that even before the computer revolution, while spending on instruction declined by 9.5 percent at public universities from 1976 to 1994, expenditures on research increased by 21 percent. The American Association of University Professors, examining changes in the academic work force, notes that from 1975 to 1995 the share of full-time faculty positions declined while the use of part-time faculty more than doubled. "In the end students were paying more for their classes and getting less," Noble argues in a recent paper, "Digital Diploma Mills," that links the growth in online learning to the increasingly commercial focus of universities. At least some students seem to agree. In May of 1996, at the University of Utah, Jeff Casper and Heather Fortuna were elected president and vice-president of the student body after running under the slogan "Get Real" and campaigning against the virtual university. "I took a class in one of my majors where the bulk of the instruction was done through computer," Fortuna explained, "and it was the most tedious thing that I ever had to deal with. I learned very little in comparison with the experiences I've had inside the classroom."

"IT has been the fate of American higher education to develop in a pre-eminently businesslike culture," the historian Richard Hofstadter wrote in 1952. Through the years, Hofstadter acknowledged, America's universities had fostered the nation's technological and economic development. But too often, he lamented, higher education in America was judged on purely pragmatic grounds. "Education is justified apologetically as a useful instrument in attaining *other* ends: it is good for business or professional careers," he wrote. "Rarely, however, does anyone presume to say that it is good for man."

Some would argue that Hofstadter's vision of higher education is an unaffordable luxury. In today's information age ideas have become prized commodities. Still, even on the utilitarian grounds that traditionalists like Hofstadter would scorn, preserving the distinction between higher education and business is vitally important.

For if commercial criteria are allowed to prevail, schools not only risk shrinking their educational mission—they risk ceasing to be centers of technological innovation as well. Paul Berg, a Nobel Prize–winning biochemist we met with at Stanford, tells a story that dramatically illustrates why. Berg, seventy-three, is a seminal figure in the biotech revolution, having laid the groundwork for splicing DNA to make hybrid molecules. (Stanley Cohen and Herbert Boyer built on Berg's work to create the first recombinant DNA clone.) His discovery propelled the billion-dollar industry that is now hailed as a model of university-industry relations. But Berg points to an underlying irony. "The biotech revolution itself would not have happened had the whole thing been left up to industry," he says. "Venture-capital people steered clear of anything that didn't have obvious commercial value or short-term impact. They didn't fund the basic research that made biotechnology possible." Berg recalls that shortly after his own pathbreaking discovery he gave a seminar at the Merck pharmaceutical company, where he met a young scientist who had been pursuing the same idea. When this scientist encountered some obstacles after six or seven months, Merck prevented him from continuing to work on the project. "Even though Merck was widely championed for its support of research, they wouldn't let him go beyond a certain point," Berg says, "and that is just one of the limitations of corporate research."

The freedom of universities from market constraints is precisely what allowed them in the past to nurture the kind of open-ended basic research that led to some of the most important (and least expected) discoveries in history. Today, as the line between basic and applied science dissolves, as professors are encouraged to think more and more like entrepreneurs, a question arises: Will the Paul Bergs of the future have the freedom to explore ideas that have no obvious and immediate commercial value? Only, it seems, if universities cling to their traditional ideals and maintain a degree of independence from the marketplace. This will not be easy in an age of dwindling public support for higher education. But the nation's top-flight universities can lead the way by collectively establishing new guidelines designed to preserve academic freedom in all their interactions with industry. These could include forbidding professors from having direct financial ties to the companies sponsoring their research; banning universities themselves from investing in these companies; prohibiting publication delays of more than thirty to sixty days and any other editorial constraints; and minimizing proprietary restrictions on basic research tools. In addition, universities could do more to make the case for preserving public support for higher education while refusing to tailor either the research agenda or the curriculum to the needs of industry. "The best reason for supporting the college and the university," Hofstadter wrote, "lies not in the services they can perform, vital though such services may be, but in the values they represent. The ultimate criterion of the place of higher learning in America will be the extent to which it is esteemed not as a necessary instrument of external ends, but as an end in itself."

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40	$ 133	$ 175	$ 203	$ 253	$ 290
45	$ 190	$ 238	$ 283	$ 348	$ 405
50	$ 255	$ 308	$ 388	$ 495	$ 643
55	$ 360	$ 418	$ 585	$ 1,280	$ 2,618
60	$ 503	$ 608	$ 880	$ 5,923	$ 5,923
65	$ 818	$ 983	$ 1,320	$ 7,858	$ 7,858
70	$1,363	$ 1,713	$ 3,820	$10,003	$10,003
75	$2,613	$ 5,158	$14,613	$14,613	$14,613

Male Premiums

Age	10 YEAR	15 YEAR	20 YEAR	25 YEAR	30 YEAR
35	$ 115	$ 143	$ 183	$ 243	$ 290
40	$ 145	$ 193	$ 253	$ 340	$ 365
45	$ 210	$ 305	$ 385	$ 480	$ 575
50	$ 330	$ 495	$ 580	$ 730	$ 1,193
55	$ 500	$ 695	$ 825	$ 1,910	$ 3,333
60	$ 783	$ 1,110	$ 1,265	$ 7,980	$ 7,980
65	$1,330	$ 1,790	$ 2,295	$10,105	$10,105
70	$2,473	$ 3,175	$ 6,970	$13,335	$13,335
75	$4,105	$ 9,293	$20,488	$20,488	$20,488

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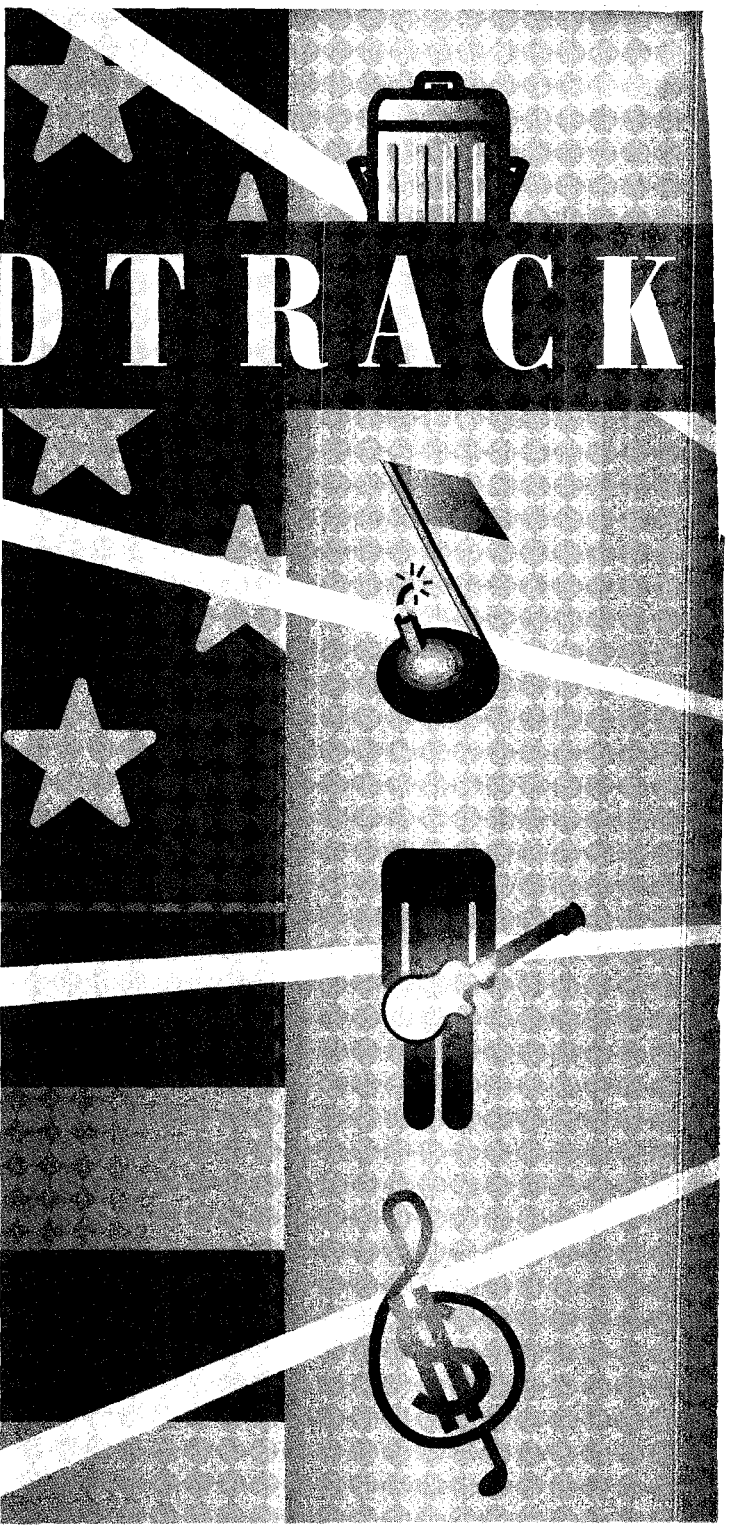
THE SOUNDTRACK

by J. BOTTUM



Music made sense when the world did. Now the sense is gone, but the melody lingers on—everywhere. We live surrounded by music, from torch songs at Starbucks to the Beatles in the elevator, and the barrage may be turning our minds to mush

A WRITER my wife and I knew in New York would sometimes invite us down for drinks on a late-summer afternoon. There in his apartment off Washington Square he would load into the stereo his latest CD—with an odd, expectant look of pride, as though by discovering an album he were somehow responsible for making it—and turn the music up so loud that the windows would rattle in their casements and the neighbors would dive to catch their toppling vases.

"Isn't it lovely?" he'd bellow above the din, and we would nod and smile dutifully before slipping off to the bathroom to cower, like dogs during a thunderstorm, in relative quiet until the terror ended.

The first time anyone openly acknowledged music as a weapon may have been during the 1989 invasion of Panama, when U.S. soldiers bombarded the Vatican envoy's house with rock-and-roll in an attempt to chivy out the fugitive Manuel Noriega. But the truth is that we all are terrorized by music nowadays. It's not so much the high school kids parading down the street with boom boxes, or the college students partying away a Saturday afternoon, or the insomniac in the next apartment pacing up and down to Beethoven at 3:00 A.M. It's, rather, the merciless stream of 1960s golden oldies drenching suburban malls, the disco-revival radio thumping out Donna Summer in the back of a taxi all the way to the airport, the tinny Muzak bleating from storefronts as you walk along the sidewalk, the tastefully muted Andrew Lloyd Webber seeping from recessed speakers above the urinals in the men's room. America is drowning in sanctioned music—an obligatory orchestration cramming every inch of public space. There's hardly a bar in which to nurse a quiet drink or a café in which you don't have to shout your order above the upbeat swing of 1940s big-band standards.

Perhaps it was Hollywood that taught us to expect life to come with background music, a constant melodic commen-

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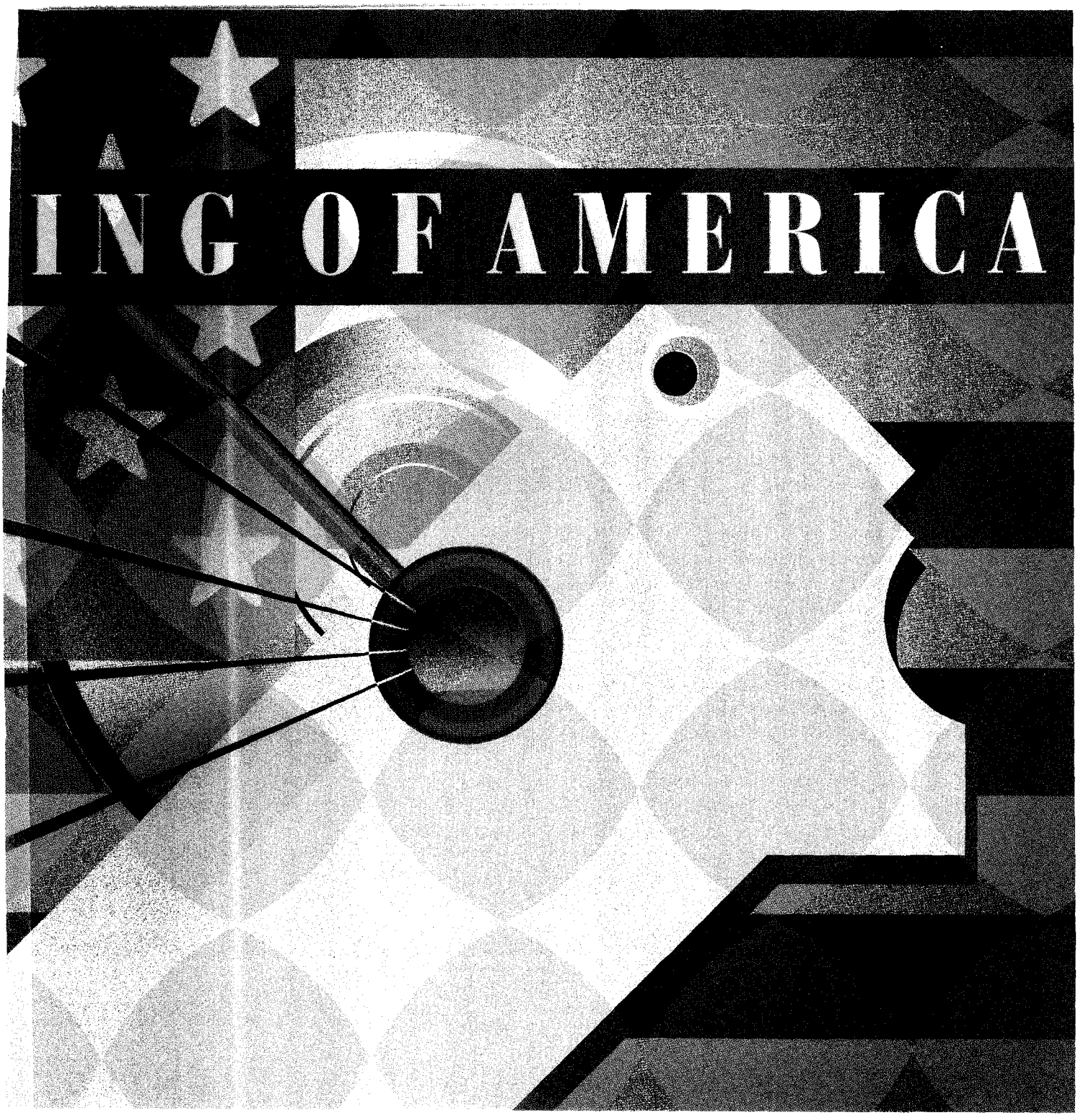

tary on the movie of our lives. But we are soundtracked nowadays with relentless demands for only the most obvious and officially appropriate emotions. You *should* be as bright and bubble-gummy as the Monkees' "I'm a Believer" when you shop for a new pair of blue jeans. You *ought* to be as sophisticatedly ironic as Frank Sinatra's "They've Got an Awful Lot of Coffee in Brazil (The Coffee Song)" when you go out to eat. There's something *wrong* if you aren't as moody and melancholy as the Cowboy Junkies' whispery version of "Sweet Jane" when you sit in a midtown bar. Popular urban chains such as Pottery Barn and Starbucks even sell CDs of the proper ambient melodies for shopping in their stores.

Of course, the movie sort of soundtrack never quite works, because in real life it's delivered entirely in snippets, as we cross from one stereo zone to another—the radio suddenly blaring out as the car starts up, the jukebox suddenly cut off as the door to the diner closes. In a Washington, D.C., office building I was recently subjected first to a stomach-churning fifteen seconds of Rimsky-Korsakov's "Flight of the Bumblebee" as the elevator rattled up to my floor, then to five jangly seconds of guitar in the Beatles' "Can't Buy Me Love" from a delivery-man's radio down the hall, and then, as I stood by the recep-

Illustrations by John Mattos

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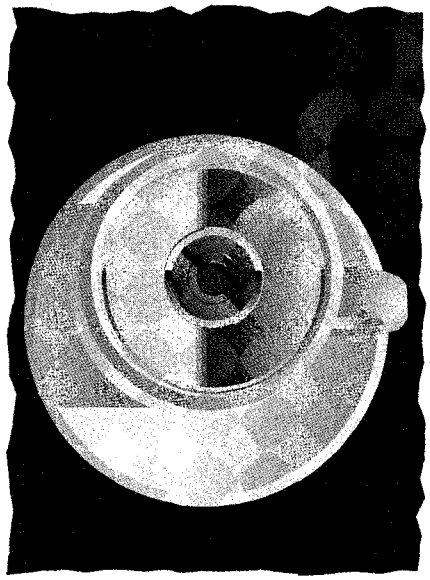
tionist's desk, to a minute and a half of one of those insane seventeenth-century Scottish folk tunes whose purpose was to make the tartan clans seize their two-handed battle swords and wade through English blood, howling like the sea. We've all been damned to a perpetual quarter-final round of *Name That Tune*.



And it's not just in public spaces. Private life in America is equally littered with dissociated musical fragments, from the moment the clock radio turns on in the morning until the "sleep" function turns it off at night. You can snatch five minutes of Copland's *Appalachian Spring* while you gulp your first cup of coffee, take in the second act of a Mussorgsky opera during the morning commute, slip a CD into the office computer and squeeze in a little Villa-Lobos between department meetings, recognize a scrap of Holst's *The Planets* in the theme song for the evening news, and fall asleep after dinner in the middle of Dvořák's *New World Symphony*.

Children at summer camp, college students in their library carrels, soldiers at war in the desert: Americans seem incapable of going without music. It pours from the open windows of the apartment house across the street and the car in the next lane at the stoplight. "Let us rather spend our time in conversation," the doctor Eryximachus tells Socrates as he dismisses the after-supper flautist in Plato's *Symposium*—but when did you last go to a dinner party at which the stereo didn't rumble through the evening? When you add up the radio stations, the local philharmonics, the jazz clubs under the freeway, the dingy used-record stores, the movie studios, the $1.3 billion market for rap music, the $1.9 billion spent on revivified country-western, and all the rest, American music represents an enormous cultural investment.

In 1981 the philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre published *After Virtue*, an influential attack on the fragments of Enlightenment philosophy that constitute much of our contemporary moral discourse. Part of his argument is a devastating account of the rise of twentieth-century "emotivism," and nearly the only thing he missed is its curious parallel in the rise of recorded music. People began to imagine that morality was a set of feelings rather than a system of ideas at around the time they began to be able to evoke any mood they wanted by putting a 78 on a phonograph.

The significance of this parallel has gone largely unremarked. In his best-selling *The Closing of the American Mind* (1987), Allan Bloom did complain a little. Remembering Plato's warning in the *Republic* against dangerous art, Bloom suggested that Friedrich Nietzsche had been perfectly right to seek in music an anti-rational weapon with which to savage nineteenth-century Christian culture. "In song and in dance," Nietzsche declared in *The Birth of Tragedy Out of the Spirit of Music*, man "feels himself as a god, he himself now walks about enchanted, in ecstasy." This is the power that "freed Prometheus from his vultures," the "fire magic of music." If, Bloom seemed to argue, we want to reject Nietzsche's call for ecstatic irrationality—if we want to preserve a classically derived, religiously informed, rationally enlightened social order—then we must swallow Plato's bitter pill and banish music from our lives.

But it turned out to be only rock music—"a nonstop, commercially prepackaged masturbational fantasy" with "all the moral dignity of drug trafficking"—to which Bloom really objected. He even ended up mildly praising the effect of classical-music recordings on his undergraduates at the University of Chicago.

This faith in the power of music seems universal nowadays. We have come to believe in music's power to shape not only our emotions but our very beings. In 1998 Governor Zell Miller, of Georgia, asked for $105,000 from the state budget for a program to send every newborn child home from the delivery room with a classical CD titled *Build Your Baby's Brain—Through the Power of Music*. The idea grew out of a hopeless misinterpretation of a study suggesting that listening to Mozart might improve the grades of *college* students. But it was in its way a marvelous example of what far too many people, liberal and conservative, seem to imagine we should do: get people to have the right behaviors by inducing the right feelings, rather than by transmitting the right knowledge.

PEOPLE BEGAN TO IMAGINE THAT MORAL
THAN A SYSTEM OF IDEAS AT AROUND
TO EVOKE ANY MOOD THEY WANTED

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Since music is the greatest creator of moods that human beings have ever discovered, why shouldn't we swaddle newborns in the properly chosen music?

Recorded music long ago relieved us of the hard labor of performing what we wanted to hear. It relieved us of the necessity of going to a concert hall. And now it has even relieved us of any need to listen. In the soundtracking of America—in the constantly segueing fragments that fill our public and private spaces—music is merely the inescapable background, the relentless mood-setter, the arbiter and signal of proper behavior. Those poor babies down in Georgia may never know an unorchestrated moment in their lives.

ENDLESS SOPHISTICATION, ENDLESS IRONY

HARDLY anyone seems to remember that music stands fairly low on the traditional list of devices by which we try to understand human experience. Who ever learned anything from music except the emotional power of music? It's a thin rather than an intellectually thick art form, and a people that takes music as the highest expression has cut itself off from narrative, epic, allegory—from the explanatory arts that could put to any use the emotions music represents.

A handful of the most serious composers may have sought with their music a philosophically complete account of human emotion. For Beethoven the aim may even have been conscious: "Music," he once said, "is a higher revelation than all wisdom and philosophy." But we have no one with such a grand scheme today. Even to attempt one requires that the composer's world contain what we in contemporary America lack—what our artists and intellectuals have, in fact, spent the past century systematically rejecting as anti-democratic and exclusionary: a culturally shared idea of the goal of human existence.

John Cage, with his 1952 avant-garde adventure in which a concert pianist sits silent at the keyboard for four minutes and thirty-three seconds before bowing and walking off the stage, seemed to aim—along with his fellow modern American composers—at breaking down the last vestiges of philosophical coherence that music still reflected. Even Philip Glass—who, with the mainstream triumph of his minimalist *Einstein on the Beach* (1976), became perhaps the most successful opera composer since Puccini—seems never to have entirely escaped the feeling that he was rebelling against some tyrannical remnant of purpose expressed in traditional forms.

Today such acclaimed and prizewinning composers as Lowell Liebermann and Tan Dun have left the Cage generation far behind. The subordination of music to an intelligible account of human purpose is so thoroughly lost that a contemporary composer can even indulge in a little old-fashioned coherence while he constructs a musical pastiche like *Appalachia Waltz*—Edgar Meyer's 1996 classical-and-country crossover hit, performed by the symphonic cellist Yo-Yo Ma and the down-home fiddler Mark O'Connor.

Critics of contemporary culture typically imagine that the problem lies in the music. It seems to make little difference whether the critics are the local college radio station's classical-music snobs, or the intellectual journals' wry, nostalgic Irving Berlin and Louis Armstrong fans, or the cultural conservatives and anti-pornography feminists who formed an uneasy alliance to denounce 2 Live Crew lyrics and Marilyn Manson tracks about rape and torture. They all speak as though we merely need *different* music to clear up our cultural confusions—as in that almost perfect moment in 1983 when President Ronald Reagan's Secretary of the Interior, James Watt, tried to banish what he thought of as the drug-using, 1960s-loving Beach Boys from Washington's annual Fourth of July concert and replace them with Wayne Newton, fresh from a Las Vegas lounge show.

This is an understandable impulse. In a day in which the melodic line of a typical pop song runs fewer than twelve bars, the thirty-two-bar scope of a Broadway number from the 1920s—to say nothing of the 200 bars of a nineteenth-century symphonic melody—may seem like the solution to our listening woes. But it isn't, of course, or music would have done nothing but improve since the days of medieval motets, and an elaborate show tune like Cole Porter's 108-bar "Begin the Beguine" would do more than shimmer above the tinkling cutlery down at the local brass-railing-and-blond-wood café. In fact, the sheer accessibility on CD and cassette of things like Porter's cultivated songs is what has created our modern musical problem.

ITY WAS A SET OF FEELINGS RATHER THE TIME THEY BEGAN TO BE ABLE BY PUTTING A 78 ON A PHONOGRAPH.

The mechanism by which this happened isn't all that complex. Like every other art, music naturally grows more sophisticated over time, as its creators and audience become more educated about a particular form—and then it naturally rebels against its sophistication, as musicians become sated

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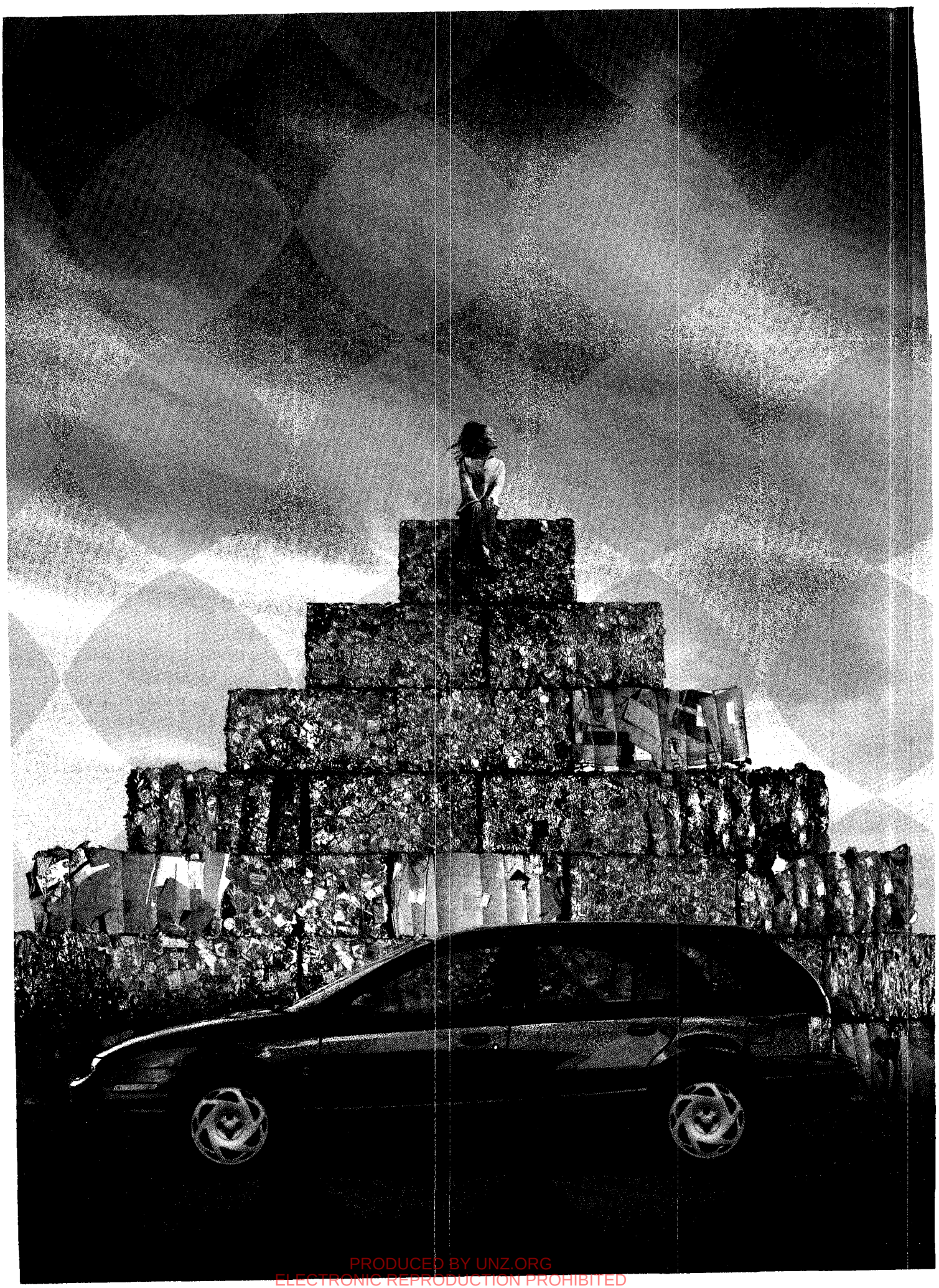

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and listeners prove unable to follow their technical advances.

You can see this pattern play out in almost any swath of music history. The rise of something like punk rock in the 1970s seems to have been inevitable, given the convoys it took to transport the orchestral stage show of Emerson, Lake & Palmer, whose rock version of Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition* may be the most pretentious performance ever attempted by a chart-topping band. The brief mainstream popularity of folk music in the early 1960s derived at least in part from the mind-numbing complexity that jazz had reached at the end of the 1950s. The enormous European audiences for opera turned to other music when confronted with a work such as Arnold Schoenberg's twelve-tone *Moses und Aron* (1932)—whose uncompleted third act, Schoenberg guilelessly suggested, could simply be read aloud to patient listeners.

This natural and probably healthy pattern of sophistication alternating with primitive rebellion has undergone an odd skew in the twentieth century. The invention of the phonograph may well have been the original cause. For the first time, performances of a successfully rebelled-against music could be preserved unchanged—vastly increasing the range of music a listener might know.

A second and more important cause was the rise of the music business, made possible by phonographs and by radio stations with hours of airtime to fill. "Concern with the social explication of art has to address the *production* of art," the twentieth-century philosopher and music critic Theodor Adorno claimed in one of his most dated Marxist rants against the West's commercialized culture. In this case Adorno was right. The appearance of a huge industry seeking new products, trying to both predict and create shifts in popular taste, gave rise to a wild acceleration of the cycle of sophistication and rebellion. By now any musical form is overwhelmed by its counterform before professional musicians have made more than a gesture at giving the form real sophistication.

A third and even more important cause of music's skew was the disappearance of the shared, Beethovenesque belief in the intellectual coherence of human beings and the world—a belief so faded that even much possibility of rebelling against it has disappeared. Music used to have a purpose: to express and, indeed, to perpetuate this shared sense of coherence. What, nowadays, is music for? We have a name for sophistication and complexity to no purpose: decadence. But in an age without a public philosophy about at least the most important things, all sophistication is purposeless and all complexity decadent.

Plato was deeply suspicious of music for much the same reason Nietzsche celebrated it: in its direct appeal to the emotions, music seems to reach behind our rational faculties. "When a man abandons himself to music," Plato declared in the *Republic*, "he begins to melt and liquefy." Nietzsche wanted to end inhibition. He denounced Richard Wagner for committing a "crime against what is highest and holiest" by composing such moralistic, anti-emotional operas as *Tristan und Isolde* (1859) and *Parsifal* (1882).

Both Plato and Nietzsche would have been surprised by how undangerous America's indulgence in music has proved to be. Why music hasn't melted us down into Nietzsche's unconstrained beasts is hard to say. Rock-and-roll certainly sounds as though it has this goal. But even as we recognize that music claims to unleash emotion at its most primitive, we also understand that it never will. "The culture industry perpetually cheats its consumers of what it perpetually promises," Adorno wrote. "All it actually confirms is that the real point will never be reached, that the diner must be satisfied with the menu."

Perhaps this perpetual unfulfillment is what has made sophisticated musical ironists of us all. Certainly Americans are given little credit by their cultural detractors for how knowledgeable they are about the breadth of music. You can see this breadth in Web sites that offer complete discographies of every diva ever recorded, or in the game by which oldies-radio-station listeners can link the countrified 1970s Flying Burrito Brothers to the British Invasion pop harmonies of the 1960s Hollies by tracing the band members through the Byrds, Buffalo Springfield, and Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young.

You can see it even more clearly in the expectation that Americans will appreciate the "Hallelujah Chorus" in TV ads for Baskin-Robbins ice cream and Bayer cat and dog flea treatment, will prefer elevators with piped-in snatches of middlebrow classics like "Flight of the Bumblebee" and the *William Tell* Overture, and will be pleased that shopping malls provide them with musical clues to decorum and the appropriate emotional attitude.

Music's traditional defense against overelaboration has itself created a new kind of overelaboration. In all previous ages

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INSHALLAH

—which is to say "God willing," more or less:
a phrase that rose routinely to her lips
whenever plans were hatched or hopes expressed,
the way we knock on wood, yet fervently,
as if to wax too confident might be
to kill the very thing she wanted most.

It used to pique and trouble me somehow,
this precautionary tic of hers, but now
I understand why she was skeptical
of what Allah in His caprice allots,
because that she should live He did not will
or, more terribly, He did that she should not.

in memoriam Mirel Sayinsoy 1967–1999

—BEN DOWNING

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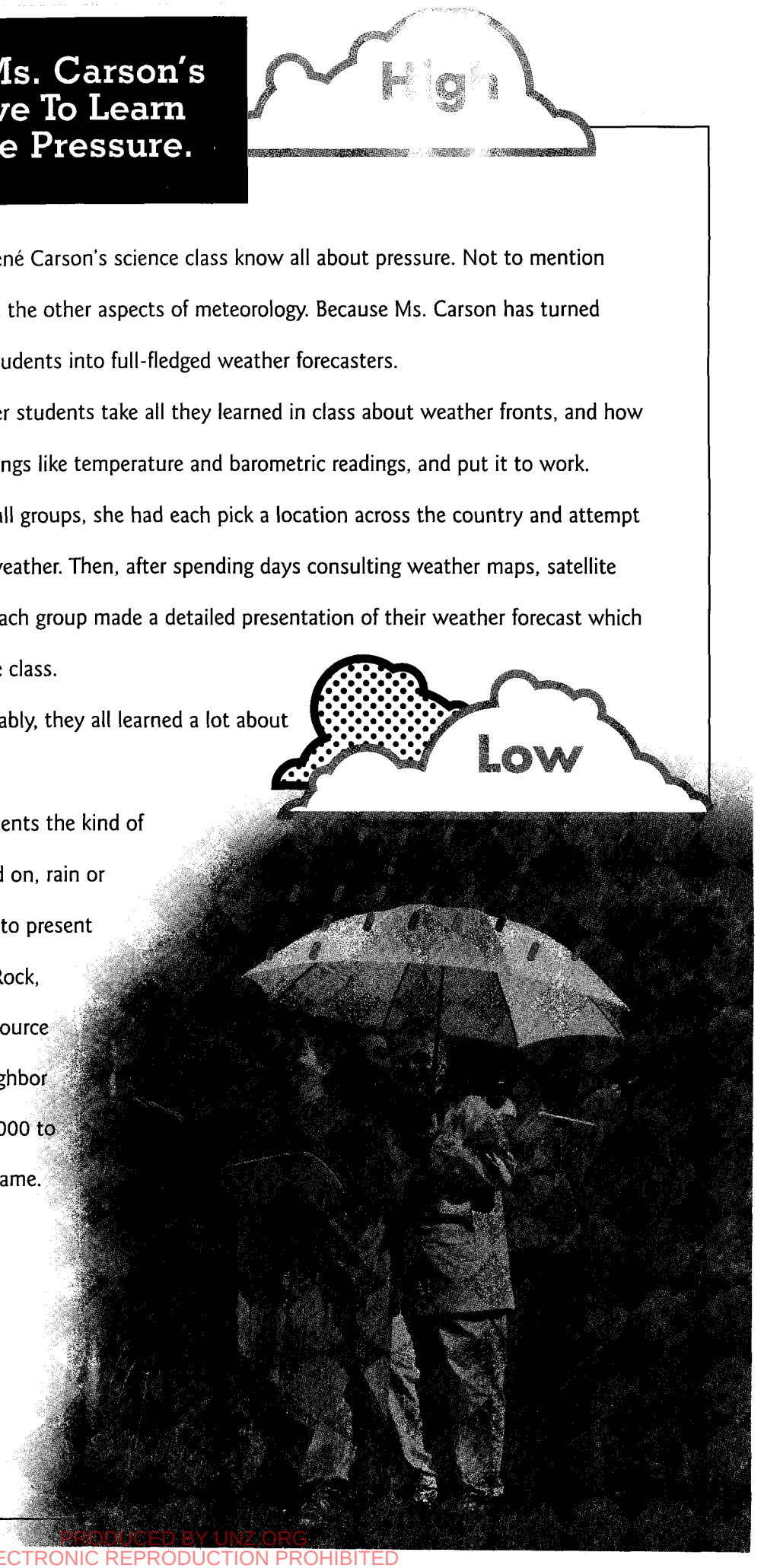

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of music a new musical form succeeded by replacing its predecessors. But now each new form *joins* its predecessors in our endlessly expanding library of music. This is what Adorno missed when he claimed, in "On the Fetish Character in Music and the Regression of Listening" (1938), that Western pop songs make us "forcibly retarded," because they're so shallow and because we're compelled to hear the same ones over and over again. It's what the long-haired classical-music lovers and the culture warriors overlook, and what the nostalgic bemoaners of popular music's decline fail to grasp. We live in the most elaborate age of music in the history of the world. Ours is an extraordinary kind of musical sophistication that can never be rejected without creating yet more sophistication, shallower but wider, and yet another musical form to know.

Thus Paul Simon can swing from African music to Cajun to Chicano without penalty and get top billing on a concert tour with Bob Dylan after having spent the early portion of his career being dismissed by pop sophisticates as the poor man's Dylan. Cher, like one of those bottom-weighted inflatable dolls that won't stay down, bobs from folk rocker in a shag vest to family-hour TV minstrel to slinky torch singer to chart-topping techno-rocker at age fifty-three, with the success last year of her single "Believe." In the soundtracking of modern America neither musical sophistication nor musical rebellion can make anything go away. Not even Cher.

IDEAS, YES. ULTIMATE PURPOSE, NO

NEARLY every art seems to have diminished in the second half of the twentieth century. Dance, painting, fiction—it's not that we lack talent, interest, or financing for them; it's that we seem to lack sufficient reason to employ them. The last thing a shared world view does before it dies is to provide a target for revolt. The lengths to which artists go nowadays to make sure someone notices their revolt may be the best measure of how nearly complete is the decay of our old-fashioned, ultimately classical and Judeo-Christian sense of unified purpose. The handful of notorious works in recent years—Andres Serrano's *Piss Christ*, Robert Mapplethorpe's photographs, Terrence McNally's play *Corpus Christi*—mostly prove how desperate artists are to feel like rebels. And the relatively mild reaction to them proves how hopeless this aim is. We have come a long way from Dublin's brawling outrage at John Synge's comic *The Playboy of the Western World* in 1907 and from New York's nativist response to the British actor William Macready's appearance as Macbeth in 1849, which left twenty-two dead outside the Astor Place Theater while a mob howled, "Burn the damned den of the aristocracy."

Yet music has survived the decay of a public metaphysics—a shared belief in the coherent relations among God and nature and human culture—because, more than any other art, music produces its effect without demanding a philosophical frame. To appeal to and create an emotion, a piece of music needs to make no particular gesture toward its purpose.

IN ALL PREVIOUS AGES OF MUSIC A NEW MUSICAL FORM SUCCEEDED BY REPLACING ITS PREDECESSORS. BUT NOW EACH NEW FORM *JOINS* ITS PREDECESSORS IN OUR ENDLESSLY

The late-nineteenth-century proponents of art for art's sake were after this when they proclaimed, as the Victorian Walter Pater put it, that "all art constantly aspires towards the condition of music." Susanne Langer was aiming for the same thing when she demanded "expressiveness, not expression" in her book *Philosophy in a New Key* (1942), which for a time was the most widely discussed philosophy text in America. In the 1920s Ernst Cassirer attempted, in his three-volume *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, to define an aesthetics for a modernist, post-Kantian age that lacked confidence in metaphysical goals. Langer's brilliance twenty years later lay in recognizing that Cassirer's analysis applied most of all—perhaps only—to music. "In music," she argued, taking the situation of her own day as art's universal condition, "we have an unconsummated symbol, a significant form without conventional significance." It exists "probably below the threshold of consciousness, certainly outside the pale of discursive thinking," and thus "no assignment of meaning . . . is permanent beyond the sound that passes."

Indeed, no matter how serious and elaborate, a musical composition cannot create its own metaphysical frame entirely from within the music. Even those who appreciate music in all its forms must recognize that music is not a rational art and cannot express an actual idea. I once knew an aspiring music reviewer—in some ways as intelligent a man as I've ever met—who couldn't stop himself from writing things like "the sunshiney arc of the symphony's second movement" and "the darkling power of the *adagio appassionato*." (Music critics hate to use an English phrase when there's a perfectly good Italian one.) He knew he wouldn't stomach anything similar in a review of poetry or fiction. But what was he to do? He *felt* it all so deeply, and there just didn't seem to be a vocabulary for what he felt. "Who is there that, in logical words, can express the effect mu-

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sic has on us?" Thomas Carlyle asked in one of his nineteenth-century lectures on heroes and hero worship. Music is "a kind of inarticulate, unfathomable speech, which leads us to the edge of the Infinite."

That, of course, is the problem. There aren't any words for it, because there really isn't any *it*: no intellectual content, no idea in the melody. Even in, say, Vivaldi's *Four Seasons*—in, that is, a deliberate effort to make music express something rational—the ideas it takes forty-five minutes to convey amount to little more than winter is cold and summer hot, in spring things grow and in fall they don't.

thing, and have no purpose in and of themselves. It's no accident that child prodigies—with the skill of adults and the experience of children—appear in music, chess, and math but never in poetry or philosophy. One pretentiously highbrow class of music criticism—George Bernard Shaw said he could teach a poodle to write it in two hours—involves nothing more than explaining music's underlying technicality.

What we experience in music is something else. Music stands, at last, as "evocative"—a word whose only other use is in advertisements for expensive perfume. Music is chess drenched with perfume.

NEW MUSICAL FORM SUCCEEDED NOW EACH FORM *JOINS* ITS EXPANDING LIBRARY OF MUSIC.

There is, anyway, something artificial and incidental about forcing ideas into music. Handel's *Messiah*, by a long mile the most-often-performed piece of classical music in America, is full of small examples of this effort to slip in some extra rationality, the score drawing little explanatory pictures of the libretto. God has made the "rough places plain," Handel's tenor informs the audience—and the word "rough" he trills roughly, and the word "plain" he holds plain. "All we like sheep have gone astray," the chorus sings from Isaiah 53—and the singing voices go astray, every one to his own way. It comes across as stupendous. It sounds superb. And considered purely as an idea, it's on a par with what might occur to a child asked to illustrate with crayons an uplifting text from a second-grade reader.

Plenty of genuine ideas exist in music, of course; they're just not what we mean by "ideas" in any nonmusical sense. They express musical techniques and music's root mathematical structure, and exactly what they have to do with what we experience while listening is something no one has ever satisfactorily explained. The fascinating elegance of music's mathematical technicalities made a Pulitzer Prize–winner of Douglas Hofstadter's book on formal recursion, *Gödel, Escher, Bach* (1979), and a best-selling album of *Switched-On Bach* (1968), with its synthesized fugues so absurdly accelerated that nothing survived except the underlying geometry of the music.

But these are ideas like the ideas in chess or math. They don't mean any-

THE FUTILITY OF MUSICAL POETRY

I HAVE a cousin who is a musician, a keyboardist who played in Faith No More, a band that found some real success in the early 1990s. In its start-up days in San Francisco, while the musicians warmed up the audience for a concert headliner or pounded away above the hubbub at a club date, they would sometimes perform a version of the theme song for Nestlé's candy bars: "Chocolate dreams you can't resist, N-E-S-T-L-E-S." It was funny how marvelous they could make that absurd advertising jingle sound. But when you think about it for a moment, the comedy and irony begin to seem much too easy. Where, in fact, does one find any profundity in song?

The problem begins with the general failure of lyrics, the incapacity of sung words to introduce and maintain in music the ideas the music itself lacks. "Nothing is capable of being well set to music that is not nonsense," gibed the eighteenth-century essayist Joseph Addison. The most famous poem set to music undoubtedly remains Friedrich Schiller's "Ode to Joy" (1785), which—*Freude! Freude!*—Beethoven in his Ninth Symphony made sound as though God himself were speaking, but which as poetry ranks somewhere between Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's "Lives of great men all remind us / We can make our lives sublime" and William Ernest Henley's "I am the master of my fate, / I am the captain of my soul."

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Schiller's "Ode to Joy" is perfectly serviceable parlor verse, but "profound" is not exactly the word for it: "He who has a noble wife, / Let him join our mighty song of rejoicing!" And it doesn't magically become profound when sung by massed choirs backed with roaring timpani and trilling violins. It only sounds that way. What Schiller becomes in Beethoven's hands is not wise but only sensible. We grow confused and imagine that we must be having a deep thought because we feel it so deeply.

You can see the failure of musical poetry even in the short span of rock's dominance. The Canadian poet Leonard Cohen turned to music in the late 1960s after listening to Bob Dylan and Sonny Bono and realizing that an imperfect voice need not be a hindrance to pop success. If Cohen wrote a higher class of lyrics than some other rock-era composers (the song "Suzanne," the lines "God is alive, / Magic is afoot"), it was at the price of writing a lower class of poetry. The Velvet Underground founder Lou Reed studied as an undergraduate with the complex and serious poet Delmore Schwartz, but that didn't stop Reed from making an early recording (as Andy Warhol told the story) by tuning all the strings of his electric guitar to the same note and banging away at it, screaming "Do the Ostrich" over and over again until the studio technicians came in and made him stop.

And the quality of musical verse falls off rapidly from Schiller and Cohen and Reed. Most opera lyrics are second-rate poesy, most musical-theater songs are worse, and most popular tunes are worse yet. Can anyone ever actually have sat down and read Stephen Foster's lyrics without the music? It's interesting to imagine what Edgar Allan Poe, a contemporary critic scribbling devastating newspaper reviews for a pittance, would have said if Foster had published as straight poetry lines like "Beautiful dreamer, out on the sea, / Mermaids are chaunting the wild lorelie; / Over the streamlet vapors are borne, / Waiting to fade at the bright coming morn." Poe wrote in 1849, "There are few cases in which mere popularity should be considered a proper test of merit, but the case of song-writing is, I think, one of the few."

Today's critics are equally skeptical about the profundity of lyrics. The columnist Dave Barry, for instance, has succeeded in making the inanity of 1970s pop lyrics a staple of American humor. From Carl Douglas's "Everybody was Kung Fu fighting. / Those cats were fast as lightning" to Neil Diamond's "I am, I said, to no one there, / And no one heard at all, not even the chair," you can hear, across America, offhand ridicule of the music of the 1970s. Even the brief disco revival in the 1990s was kept afloat with mockery, mostly involving the impossibility of doing anything but howl at lines like "MacArthur Park is melting in the rain. / I don't think that I can take it / 'Cause it took so long to bake it / And I'll never have that recipe again."

The interesting thing is not that millions of Americans can laugh at the bad lyrics they know but that millions of Americans *know* the bad lyrics. Old pop tunes are our major source of shared knowledge. Not everybody knows literature or politics, but everybody can sing along with "A Hard Day's Night." Not even the heavily recycled 1950s and 1960s television series, movies, and sports heroes of the aging Baby Boomers are anywhere near as recognizable among younger generations.

When E. D. Hirsch published *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know* (1987), he unwittingly exposed the strangeness of our modern predicament. Attacking contemporary education for trying to teach techniques without content, Hirsch told an anecdote about his father's writing in a business letter the tag "There is a tide" with the reasonable expectation that the recipient would catch the reference to Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*.

Hirsch was right that it is hard to imagine a pair of businessmen corresponding this way anymore, just as he was right that such shared tags help to communicate complex thoughts in efficient ways. But he was wrong when he concluded his book with 5,000 references (subsequently expanded in a cottage industry of dictionaries and encyclopedias) that were useful for average Americans to know. What was odd about *Cultural Literacy* is odd about all recent collections of quotations. To look through any of them—the *Oxford Dictionary of Modern Quotations*, *The 2,548 Best Things Anybody Ever Said*, the latest edition of Bartlett's—is to realize that they are not tools for pinning down what we already know vaguely, the kind of thing John Bartlett thought he was providing in his 1855 *Familiar Quotations*. They are instead *un*familiar quotations—useful crib sheets, curiosities of literature, and after-dinner speakers' handbooks filled with lines their users don't know and are not in the least expected to know.

Hirsch's mistake lay in forgetting that the old cultural knowledge was not meaningful because it was shared; it was shared because it was meaningful. It all fit into a frame, a generally accepted public system of belief about the way God and history and the world work. And when that frame at last broke, the old knowledge drifted out of public awareness, like the carefully organized contents of filing cabinets dumped in a pile and left to blow away sheet by sheet.

The gap at the center of culture didn't stay empty. It gradually silted up with something much like what Hirsch would later advocate—something shared even if it wasn't meaningful. It filled with the lyrics of American popular songs—from "Yankee Doodle" to "Dixie" to "Will the Circle Be Unbroken?" to "Streets of Laredo" to "Happy Birthday to You" to "White Christmas" to "You Are My Sunshine" to "Heartbreak Hotel" to "Sixteen Going on Seventeen" to "Good Vibrations" to "Billie Jean" to the *Titanic* theme song. Who can doubt that more Americans know "When You Wish Upon a Star" than know who was President when Walt Disney put the song in *Pinocchio*?

It would be wrong to say that the composers and performers of those songs never imagine they are conveying actual intellectual content. So, too, it would be wrong to suppose that listeners never take pop lyrics seriously. In sixth grade my friends and I all believed that "One Tin Soldier," the theme

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song to the 1971 movie *Billy Jack*, was the deepest thing ever thought. A roommate I had in college felt he was handing on the wisdom of the ages when he tunelessly punctuated conversation with more or less apt quotations from Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young's "Teach Your Children," John Lennon's "Imagine," Aerosmith's "Dream On," and Kansas's "Dust in the Wind."

Mostly, though, no one bothers to think for long that the words to songs should mean anything in particular. We just share them. Far more important than any of the Beatles' songs—or even than the murder of John Lennon, in 1980—was the fact that everyone in a particular generation knew the band's hits. Far more important than any of Nirvana's songs—or even than the suicide of Kurt Cobain, in 1994—was the fact that everyone in a particular generation knew the Seattle grunge band's recordings.

The 1990s decline of rock as the dominant pop music has made available for general knowledge many other forms. We have the widest and most widely shared knowledge of the range of music the world has ever known. What defines an American these days better than the ability to hum along with both Handel and Frank Sinatra, the Rolling Stones and Charles Wesley, Ella Fitzgerald and Hank Williams, Richard Wagner and the Nestlé's-chocolate-bar song?

MEMORIES OF MEANING

THEODOR Adorno has proved spectacularly wrong in his 1938 prediction that broadcast music would make us "forcibly retarded." He did correctly observe that "regressive listening"—the passive submission of listeners to a bombardment of new pop songs everywhere they go—is "tied to production by the machinery of distribution, and particularly by advertising." That's the joke when a rising San Francisco rock band plays an advertising jingle with a wink and a nod for a knowing crowd of teenagers. But even Adorno, the most culturally observant of the mid-century Marxists, was too much of a traditionalist to guess that the stupidity of popular music would make us not stupid but ironic.

If decadence is what happens when intelligence turns entirely to trivia, irony is what happens when intelligence wraps itself around stupidity. How could we not become ironic when so much of our public knowledge consists of thousands of lines of song lyrics written for the most part after the collapse of a common metaphysics that might have given them a purpose and an order? We share an enormous amount of information, and we know it doesn't mean anything, and we smile wryly at one another as we sing along.

Last year in a *New York Times* essay about attending a lecture given by George Martin, the Beatles' music producer, Richard Panek wrote,

> Shortly after hearing [Martin's lecture], I found myself attending an impromptu solo performance of a Beatles song in the privacy of my own living room. My 8-year-old son announced that he was now going to sing "Ob-La-Di, Ob-La-Da."
>
> "The *Anthology* version," he added.
>
> Ah, yes: the *Anthology* version, recorded 3, 4, 5 July 1968, an outtake that "included overdubs of three saxophones and conga drums," according to the liner notes. . . . Yet halfway through the song, my son added a telltale "Ha ha ha ha" that was not in the *Anthology* rendering of the song. I looked at him.
>
> "I switched to the *White Album* version," he explained. Then he resumed his performance. Yet at the end of the song, I had to look at him questioningly once again. Where were the whoops and wheezes and falsetto "Thank you"?
>
> He shrugged. "I switched back to the *Anthology* version."
>
> And I thought: Lucky him. . . .

At a certain age boys delight in knowing things simply for the sake of knowing them; Panek and his son could just as well have been talking about baseball or movies or cars. But they were talking about music, and there's something disconcerting in a story about an eight-year-old with this level of knowledge of a piece of popular music recorded twenty-three years before he was born. It has to do in part with the "lowbrow scholasticism" (in the words of David Denby) involved, the induction of a child into the complex trivialities of popular culture. And it has to do with that "Lucky him"—the father's earnest irony about a son's memorizing his father's music.

MUSIC STANDS FAIRLY LOW ON THE WHICH WE TRY TO UNDERSTAND HUMAN ANYTHING FROM MUSIC EXCEPT THE

The most disturbing thing in Panek's account, however, is the meaninglessness of the knowledge the boy and the father share, the way it doesn't fit anywhere or do anything—for somehow we still expect more than this from music. You could learn how to live from Woody Guthrie's songs, Bob Dylan once claimed. It isn't true, of course; mostly what you could learn from Woody Guthrie was how 1930s political rad-

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icalism, when fitted to the guitar chord progressions of West Virginia, could masquerade as the ancient wisdom of the American soul. But Dylan was on to a truth about certain pieces of music.

You can feel that truth in William Byrd's *Mass on the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin*, Bach's *Saint Matthew Passion*, and Handel's *Messiah*. There's an echo still lingering in old blues tunes and in Mahalia Jackson's gospel. It's there in the Enlightenment confidence that runs from Mozart to Beethoven, trailing off in Brahms. The instrumentalist Robbie Robertson has said of the long 1967 recording sessions with Dylan that became *The Basement Tapes* (and are the subject of Greil Marcus's *Invisible Republic*, one of the best books ever written on American music) that Dylan's songs always sounded as though he'd just found them in a collection of old folk songs. Taken line by line, folk lyrics may seem as silly as the words to twentieth-century popular music. But you can nonetheless sometimes catch in genuine folk tunes a glimpse of the real depths—a world where, even if only tragically, God and man and nature still make sufficient sense that there can be a cathartic purpose to the emotion the music evokes.

The trouble is that these depths can't be faked in a different kind of world. With *Blood on the Tracks* (1974), Dylan came as close to succeeding as anyone. Bruce Springsteen made one effort, with the relatively slow-selling 1982 album *Nebraska*, and fled back to pop. The 1950s Woody Guthrie line of folk populism devolved into middle-class leftism, ending with a song like John Prine's "Paradise," the unofficial theme song of the Sierra Club's supporters: "Then the coal company came with the world's largest shovel, / And they tortured the timber and stripped all the land." The mid-1960s folk-rock boom collapsed into the Mamas and the Papas.

Of course, we do have innumerable recordings of the old, meaningful works to listen to nowadays, from Saint Ambrose's fourth-century hymns to Beethoven's late quartets to the American folk standard "Wayfaring Stranger." But our ability to sense that they are meaningful is not the same as an ability to sense their meaning. Their purposefulness is not a purpose; knowing that they once fit somewhere is not knowing where to fit them now. What does a genuinely tragic folk song tell us, except that we no longer know what to make of tragedy?

PURPOSELESS EMOTION

In 1923 Wallace Stevens published a poem, "Peter Quince at the Clavier," that runs, "Music is feeling . . . not sound; / And thus it is that what I feel / Here in this room, desiring you, . . . / Is music."

Stevens is the American poet most fascinated by formal logic, and he probably intended us to notice that the argument in these lines commits the fallacy that logicians call illicit conversion: the fact that all cows are mammals doesn't make all mammals cows; the fact that music is feeling doesn't make feeling music.

Or perhaps Stevens didn't intend us to notice, because this is the fallacy that seems to define the modern experience of music. It's as though music were trying to convert us to the belief that we are professional performers on the instrument of our emotional selves, producing the great music of feelings.

The result can hardly be anything other than the emotivism that Alasdair MacIntyre pointed out in *After Virtue*. We translate everything, even morality, from a system of ideas to be judged true or false to a set of emotions to be judged only pleasant or unpleasant. And as the constricting intellect is forced out, consigned to cataloguing the vast range of sounds available, modern music promises that there will open up for us the free play of imagination, the fantastic improvisation of feeling—an emotional wealth undreamed of by the cramped rationality of ages past.

TRADITIONAL LIST OF DEVICES BY EXPERIENCE. WHO EVER LEARNED EMOTIONAL POWER OF MUSIC?

I wonder. Just as intelligence turns decadent when reduced to sophistication and complexity for no reason, so something peculiar happens to emotion when it has no coherent purpose except to be felt. Listening, say, to one of Byrd's sixteenth-century antiphons, do we actually feel the intensity of religious mood felt by his Renaissance audience, who shared a use for that mood? Do we actually feel as much as Beethoven's En-

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lightenment listeners, for whom his thunder echoed in a landscape of generally accepted ideas about God and man and nature? Certainly there is pleasure to be taken in the elegant mathematics of Bach's "Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring." But you can sense something thinning in the twentieth century when Frank Lloyd Wright changed the title to "Joy in Work Is Man's Desiring" for his disciples.

The tragedy we feel listening to a folk ballad, the grace we feel listening to a gospel song, the humor we feel listening to one of Haydn's symphonic jokes, and all the rest of the feelings we can use our vast knowledge of music to call upon: are these actually living emotions, or only their ghosts? Adrift on America's sea of sound—washed by constant waves of the Monkees in a clothing store, Frank Sinatra in a café, the Cowboy Junkies in a bar—we have to wonder whether Wallace Stevens and Theodor Adorno didn't have it exactly backwards: the promise of modern music to make us performers of the music of ourselves didn't stupefy us intellectually, it stunted us emotionally. After almost a hundred years of our being increasingly surrounded by music, the emotions of public America seem to have grown poorer and sadder, as though we were no longer fully capable of feeling what we feel—as though our breadth of musical knowledge had been gained by sacrificing depth of musical emotion.

Even sex has not survived undiminished. The rock-and-roll vision of love is an adolescent one, and hardly does justice to the fullness of human experience. But something more than seeing love through an adolescent's eyes is at work. D. H. Lawrence, the first great apostle of sexual salvation, wrote a poem in 1918 about music—music and impotence, curiously enough. Called "Piano," it tells the story of a woman singing seductively to a man in the dusk. In spite of his willingness to be seduced, the narrator is seized by "the insidious mastery of song," and the music arouses in him not passion but childhood memories of "Sunday evenings at home," sitting under the piano and "pressing the small, poised feet of a mother who smiles as she sings." The poem concludes,

> So now it is vain for the singer to burst into clamor,
> With the great black piano appassionato. The glamour
> Of childish days is upon me, my manhood is cast
> Down in the flood of remembrance, I weep like a child
> for the past.

Lawrence's evocation of a womb with the cave beneath the keyboard is worth noticing, as is his play on his "manhood" being "cast down in the flood of remembrance"—meaning both that the adult is formed by his childhood and that he has been rendered impotent by the memory of that childhood.

Music is tied to sex in innumerable ways: through courtship lyrics, dance, seduction, the Dionysian promise to unleash primitive emotion—yet somehow we do know, as Adorno put it, that the diner must be satisfied with the menu. All one has to do is listen to the relentless beat of Maurice Ravel's *Bolero* (1928) to realize that the sexual power of music is real. But the gap between the music and its object is real as well. It may sound absurd to ask, but what, nowadays, is sex for? Where does it fit in the scheme of things? Even as the demand for an aroused sexual desire pours out in music all around us, the emotion itself seems sadly weakened, tinged with an awareness that it used to mean much more than it does now.

In *The Closing of the American Mind*, Allan Bloom remarked on the sexual obviousness of rock and its masturbatory power to arouse teenagers in the absence of any reason, but he neglected rock's simultaneous sorrow. An oddly constant nostalgia runs through popular music alongside the sex—a sense of having somehow missed better times. Revivified Beatlemania appeared almost within days of the Beatles' breakup. With "American Pie," his 1971 ballad of rock's sad decline, Don McLean had by far the longest song to that time to receive wide play on AM pop radio. And there's that curious scene in the 1983 film *Risky Business* in which while Bob Seger roars "Take those old records off the shelf" on the stereo, the young Tom Cruise, not even born when those old records were made, dances around sexily in his underwear. The "insidious mastery of song" that D. H. Lawrence observed is based on its cruel mixing (as T. S. Eliot put it) of memory and desire. Even the music of sex becomes impotent under our awareness of its now-lost purpose.

Music is not culture. It's the mist that plays above culture. A people that takes its music as fundamental art—as we have taken music, making the all-penetrating surround of recorded noise the single most apparent fact of American society—has mistaken the foam for the sea. "I am fond of music," Hermann Hesse observes in his novel *Demian*, "I think because it is so amoral." Hesse was right about music's genuine amorality: in a culture organized around good thought, music will express the moods fitting that thought, whereas in a culture organized around bad thought, music will express the moods fitting that, too.

But what happens in a culture without thought, a culture with expression but nothing to express? The way we listen to music re-creates, more than anything else, Hesse's Glass Bead Game: a complex and sophisticated rite filled with delicate connections perceived by its priestly scholastics, lacking any meaning, and consuming the culture's intellectual and emotional energy. All that remains is ironic incongruity and the decadent moods that can survive irony: memory and desire—or, rather, nostalgia and concupiscence, the feeling of memory without anything to remember and the arousal of desire without any object of desire.

It seems a cruelly small profit on our enormous investment, our vast sophistication, our wiring of the entire nation for sound. Everyone I know adores music, as I do. But our elevation of a secondary art costs us something. Music cannot build a culture, and in America today music is in the way—keeping us from the higher arts that could aim at a unified idea and a public metaphysics, a purpose and meaning for our all-encircling noise.

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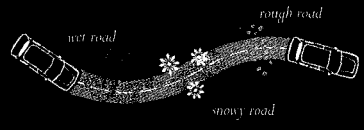

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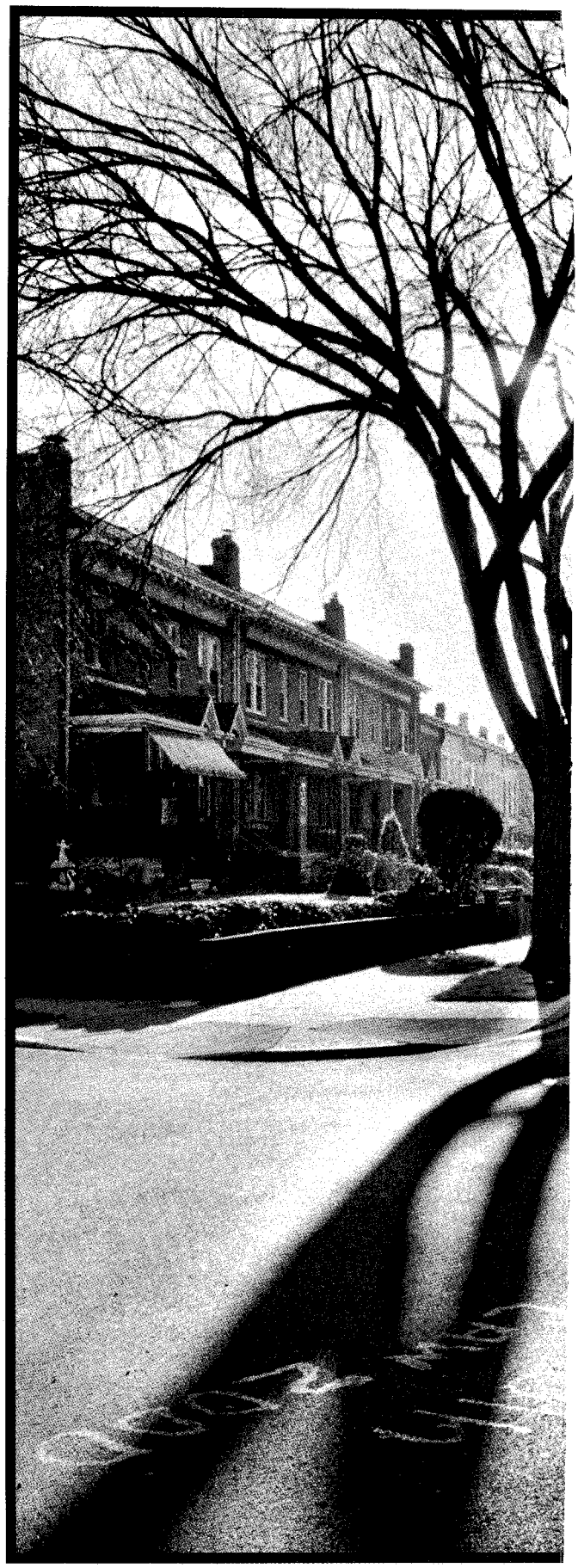
Notes on the Murder of Thirty of My Neighbors

by JIM MYERS



Killing sprees in suburban schools are rare and shocking events. Imagine, then, living in a neighborhood where a sign in a laundromat asks patrons to be sure, before putting their clothes in the wash, to empty all pockets of bullets

I DO not see a dead body in a pool of blood every week, or even every month. I saw a shooting victim quite recently, but his head had been only grazed by the bullet. The week before, I saw a car full of inch-wide bullet holes which had crashed into a tree. But everybody inside was okay, the police said. Neither event even made the local news.

I live about a mile from the U.S. Capitol, on the eastern edge of the Capitol Hill community that claims to be "Our Na-

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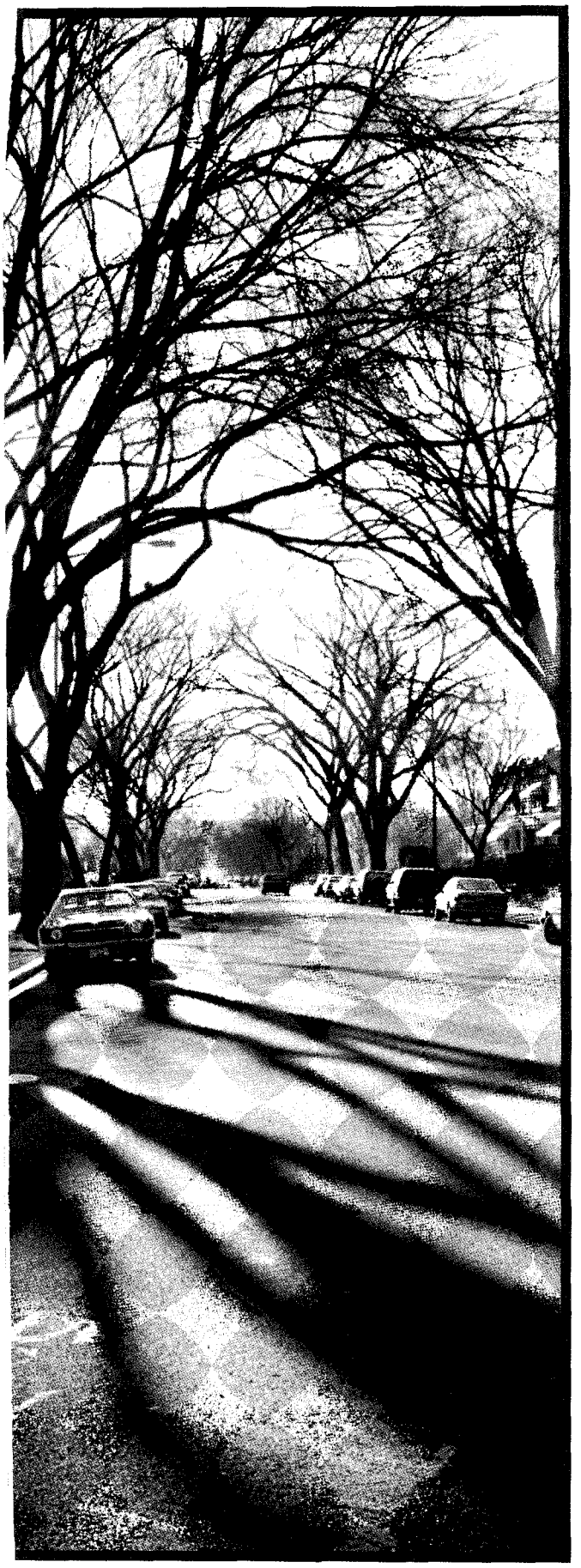

tion's Neighborhood." The Victorian row houses on my street are charming; our trees are gloriously verdant. Military bands play on the Capitol steps on summer nights. But the *pop-pop-pop* of automatic-weapons fire is the tattoo we more often hear. Near my house in the 1990s we had drive-by killings, run-by killings, sneak-up killings, gunfights and battles, car chases. We had drug killings, vengeance killings, the killing of witnesses to other crimes, accidental killings, and killings that enforce values we can only vaguely fathom. We have had so many killings that our own values have been blasted askew.

I saw two dead bodies on February 13 of last year. I was driving down Fifteenth Street, near my house, when I saw two young men who appeared to be in shock—caught up in a moment of helplessness. I quickly recognized the expression on their faces. It said, "Somebody's just been shot." Suddenly police cars were swooping down Fifteenth Street, sirens going. Two bodies lay in the back of a convenience store at the corner of Fifteenth and D.

Through the side windows we could see them on the floor near a rack of two-liter sodas. Neighbors rushed up breathless to press into the crowd at the window. Everybody was panting—after a shooting there's a panicky rush to find out who has been shot, because people we know get killed in our neighborhood more often than strangers do. Who among us will go to a convenience store to get a candy bar, *The Washington Post* wrote about these killings, and end up dead?

"It's David," one neighbor said. Word spread—it was David and Paul. And they looked dead. Indeed, David Smith looked *very* dead; his nineteen-year-old body was as limp as Jell-O when the medics rolled him over. Next to him lay Paul Watkins, eighteen; though the medics pumped frantically at his chest, he was declared dead at D.C. General.

David and Paul were part of a group that wore black hoods and silver shoes and took over the corner of Fifteenth and D as if they were staking a claim, setting up a franchise. Only those in black hoods and silver shoes were welcome. Neighbors claimed that the gang was selling drugs. The police confronted the young men repeatedly for weeks, but the group took to mocking the officers who showed up. Then the police started telling those who complained that young men in black hoods have constitutional rights too. Situations like this often end in shootings: first the corner gets wild, and then the familiar *pop-pop-pop* "resolves" the problem, the finale in our symphony of death.

After February 13 the boys in black hoods stopped gathering at Fifteenth and D—in part because the killer or killers had not been caught. Would there be more shooting? Who knew? In the uncertainty of the moment the convenience store closed for good. The group's survivors switched their gathering spot to the playground of Payne Elementary School, which has long been surrounded by this obscene violence.

THE CORNER OF KENTUCKY AVENUE AND C STREET, SE

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"Drug-Related"

At times I've tried to keep track of how many killings there have been here, but I lost count around 1995. Could I have been to twenty of these murder scenes—or more? After February 13, I asked my neighbors how many deaths they recalled, and they had no idea either; some guessed wildly at fifty, which I understand, because it *feels* like fifty. Violence can addle the mind. There have been many nonfatal shootings, too, and sometimes the victims don't die until much later—and we don't hear about it. Was it a death, or merely a flesh wound? We don't always know.

So it is surprisingly hard to remember a simple number: *How many people have been killed in my neighborhood?* According to the police, Service Area 109, which includes my house, has had thirty murders since 1992—an average of 3.8 homicides a year, or about one every three months. Additionally, police officers have shot and killed three alleged assailants in this area. These numbers can seem modest or horrifying, depending on what one considers "normal" or expects from a neighborhood like mine.

I also remember many killings before 1992 and others a block or two away that were not in Police Service Area 109. There could indeed be fifty murders weighing on my thoughts, and maybe a few more.

PSA 109, which is like a police precinct, extends eleven blocks from the Eastern Market, where vendors sell farm-fresh vegetables, homemade sausages, and great salty Virginia hams, to the D.C. jail, where many young men of my neighborhood have passed time. It also covers the sociological distance between Washington's main demographic poles, the Eastern Market end being primarily white and the D.C. jail end being primarily black. Most of our thirty murders have occurred on the jail end of this territory, and by my count only four of the victims, one of them a police officer named Jason White, were white.

There's a stigma attached to being one of D.C.'s fallen: people assume that you must have been doing something to invite your death. Your moral standing would be higher if you had been hit by a truck.

There is a disturbing detail, a signal marker on our descent into chaos: eighteen of those thirty murders are still unsolved. This is one important way in which my neighborhood is unlike Littleton, Colorado. Around the time of Littleton people kept talking about "closure"—the ubiquitous word in the aftermath of bombings, air crashes, and massacres. Rational people are supposed to seek closure. But the ghosts of eighteen unsolved murders here in our neighborhood make it impossible to put our sorrow to rest.

Of the thirty murders in PSA 109 that the police list, five are "closed," because the prime suspects were themselves murdered, though the police won't officially say who those prime suspects were. So our murders sometimes in effect "solve" other murders, which some people might find encouraging, but we may not hear about it. And it is still likely that if you are gunned down, stabbed, or garroted in PSA 109, your killer will get away with it. We live with an open invitation to kill, and it governs much more of our behavior than we like to admit.

Witnesses to crimes rarely admit to having seen anything, because they fear retaliation. They are afraid to dial 911 because they don't want a police cruiser pulling up in front of the house, identifying the caller. According to the lore of the streets, that can be a fatal mistake. Some say they trust in the Lord to exact justice, not the police and the courts. Some believe that the violence is a signal that the Second Coming is at hand.

Teenagers and young adults frequently cite the unsolved homicides as a sort of official measure of their own worth or lack thereof. They reason that if they get murdered, nothing will happen to their murderers—therefore they must not count for much. "Nobody cares about us," the young people say, which is not good. When young people believe that nobody cares, they may become more reckless. A few act out their rage on the corner. But after the *pop-pop-pop*ping somebody does care—it's obvious, if too late.

Scenes of titanic anguish unfold around many killings; they can be almost too painful to watch, as terrified neighbors rush to see if a relative has been shot. Friends and families shriek and wail; I've seen looks and gestures of cosmic grief. What if it was your child?

I remember the tortured face of Metropolitan Police Officer Earline Harris on the evening of December 30, 1993, when she had just seen her partner, Jason White, killed on the steps of a house in the 200 block of Fourteenth Street. Harris was standing in the middle of the street around the corner from my house; she had fired at the suspect, who then fled, and she was waiting for help to arrive. Looking wildly upward, she appeared to be appealing to the gods, pleading with the sky, because there was no help down here.

That's what people do at shooting scenes—they appeal to the gods. Or they stomp on the ground. Friends and relatives, caught in the hellish recognition that nothing can be done, stomp on the ground. Maybe it's worth knowing that when awful things happen and we are truly powerless, the urge to stomp on the ground is waiting in human nature. Sometimes I sense that those who enter into a discussion of violence don't really think that *they* might be killed, or that *they* might end up stomping over the death of someone close to them. Do

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THE 300 BLOCK OF FIFTEENTH STREET, SE

Hollywood moguls ever consider this possibility? Most people never discover that they have that reaction within them. They can thank God.

But Jason White was already dead; the whole city soon learned that he'd been killed with four quick shots to the head, point-blank. The shooting was labeled a uniquely cold-blooded act; President Bill Clinton spoke of White's death in his 1994 State of the Union address. But it wasn't unique at all. Hey, that's how people kill one another in my neighborhood—with point-blank shots to the head.

The world lamented the death of Officer White, but other homicides don't make the news at all, and our young people notice that, too. Again, they say that their lives are not considered important, because when they die, it's not on TV. Meanwhile, closer to the Capitol, some would like to see murders get less attention—or not always be linked to Capitol Hill. The residents of quieter, more upscale streets near the Eastern Market say of the streets where thirty of my neighbors have been murdered, "That's not the Capitol Hill *we* know."

They also say that the violence near my house is "drug-related," a phrase with almost magical properties: it raises a bulletproof barrier between the world of law and order and the world of chaos. Or so some seem to believe. If all our murders are "drug-related," then those who are not involved with drugs can feel safe. Human nature operates this way: our brains seek out whatever means necessary to distance us from frightening prospects. After all, we must carry on even as the bodies pile up.

But the fact remains that our killings may also be robbery-related, vengeance-related, love- or hate-related. If murders aren't solved, we don't learn what they were about. Instead they become the subjects of rumor and conjecture. Eighteen unsolved murders make one realize why trials are important in a civilized society. Trials tell the community what happened; they establish what the community's values are and how those values apply to each situation. Right now my neighborhood has lost touch with its values: they don't function; they're missing in action.

Derek and Coy

On June 4, 1997, the gunshots that killed my friend Derek "Fray" Williams rang out from the courtyard at the Kentucky Courts housing project. I heard the shots, walked down to see what had happened, and saw Derek lying there. Derek was someone I spoke to almost every day, but for a moment I didn't recognize him—he'd been shot point-blank in the head.

I thought I knew Derek, but for a moment he seemed like a

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stranger lying there still on the ground. In the weeks before Derek was killed, he had talked of getting out of the street life; he was recording rap songs at a local studio, and had started attending church. We had spoken about all of this. The rap songs had surprised me. They spoke about community, kids, and the better world we could create. Days before Derek died, we had discussed another shooting in this same courtyard.

That incident had happened almost five years earlier, and it had shaped the way Derek and his friends viewed the world. The victim was Coy Dontae Mason, who had just turned twenty. Derek and others cited the way Coy died as one more sign of the limited worth assigned to their lives. On a whim, I had made a video of Derek talking about Coy's death. Then Derek was killed, and I had an eerie feeling about the tape. What had made me make it?

When Derek died, his friends commented that many people seem to get killed just as they are turning their lives around. It is uncanny how often that seems to be the case. Many victims have seen the light; they are trying to change, to quit the dangerous life, and it is, oddly, then that they get shot.

But Coy's friends said that Coy had merely made a bad mistake: he tried to run away from two police officers. Around dusk on September 19, 1992, two police officers crept through a hallway at Kentucky Courts and jumped out on a crap game that Coy and about six others were having in the courtyard. According to the police, Coy pulled a Mac-11 pistol and fired at them once. I sometimes wondered if Coy had mistaken the police officers for robbers from a rival gang, because robbing crap games was big at the time—and lucrative: Coy, for example, was said to have had $4,000 in his pocket on the night he died. But police reports say that only $540 was found on or near Coy's body.

Coy's friends say that Coy dropped his gun when he realized that the intruders were cops; the gun clanked on the ground. Then Coy—half walking, half running—tried to get away, heading toward the opposite end of the courtyard. When he was about twenty-five yards away, his friends say, he slowed and put up his hands, but almost at that instant the shooting started. Coy staggered forward and through the passageway from the courtyard to the street, where he fell face down.

When I got to Kentucky Courts that night, Coy's body was lying face down on C Street, and his friends were stomping on the ground. Then some residents started shouting from the upper-floor windows at Kentucky Courts, "They shot him in the back. They shot him in the back," their words echoing down C Street, until the police threatened to arrest anyone who said this again. They were afraid it might start a riot.

The police soon told everyone that Coy had been selling drugs at Kentucky Courts and that he was "linked" to other homicides, but Coy had never been charged with such crimes. The police told me they had once confiscated $26,000 from under a mattress in his grandmother's apartment at Kentucky Courts. And where would that kind of money come from? The autopsy report says that Coy was shot seven times, all from behind. What is one to say? The case is officially closed. Yet since that time I have never met anyone at Kentucky Courts who believes the police version of Coy's death—nor have I met any officers who didn't believe the police version.

I'm friends with Coy's mother and his grandmother, so I've been over the incident and its aftermath many times. His mother still gets tears in her eyes and says, "I miss Coy so." She takes flowers and Mylar balloons to the cemetery on his birthday and holidays. The idea that the police did wrong—that they didn't need to kill her son—haunts her.

Whether the story told was accurate or not, Coy's death introduced into the neighborhood the idea that the police might shoot you in the back, and this had unfortunate repercussions. It might have been in the mind of Donzell McCauley on the December night in 1993 when Officer Jason White approached him from behind on the steps of the row house at 232 Fourteenth Street. McCauley turned and fired. One shot hit White's bulletproof vest, knocking him down; McCauley followed up with the shots to White's head.

The police swarmed over the neighborhood that night. McCauley was arrested in about fifteen minutes, but they never found the murder weapon, a Glock pistol loaded with Black Talon bullets. From jail McCauley wrote a letter to Coy Mason's brother saying that he wasn't going to let happen to him what happened to Coy. The police confiscated the letter as evidence, but McCauley never came to trial. Under the shadow of the federal death penalty—and acceding to his family's wishes—he pleaded guilty and received life without parole.

1722 Bay Street

THERE were so many killings in the mid-nineties that they were almost like community socials. Neighbors came out, greeted one another, shook hands, and shook their heads. I remember hearing one neighbor say to another, "Hey, I didn't see you at last night's shooting." Yet others in the community withdrew indoors and haven't come out since.

On February 11, 1993, not long after Coy was killed, Michael McIntyre, twenty-one, died in a pool of blood after being shot. "Pool of blood" may be a cliché, but it's also often a fact. McIntyre's body lay in a pool of blood on the floor of a takeout eatery at 129 Fifteenth Street.

That night I was walking with a newly organized Orange Hat anti-crime patrol. Armed with walkie-talkies and innocent optimism, the patrol was half a block away when the shots rang out. Some participants never again came out to patrol; one woman moved heavy furniture against her front window, as if to insulate herself from the doings outside.

McIntyre lived on the 1700 block of Bay Street. That one block on a seemingly quiet street of 1920s row houses has produced an inordinate number of victims. What is it about Bay Street?

Five young men who grew up at 1722 Bay Street have been murdered. I've seen three of them lying dead in the street. The

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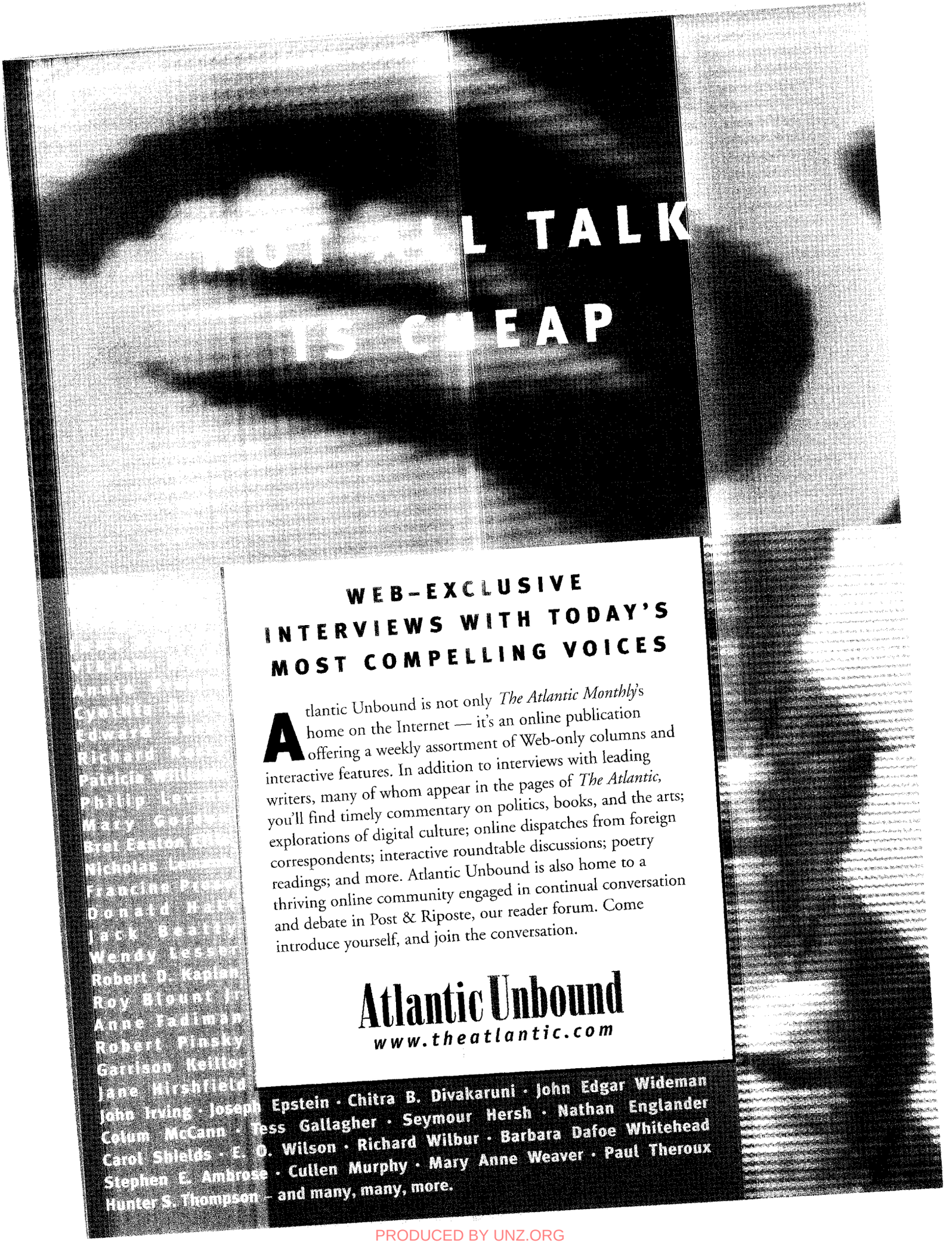

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most recent victim was Robert "Fat Rob" Ward, killed on August 4, 1997, at the corner of Sixteenth and Massachusetts Avenue. I knew him slightly. I was walking down C Street when the sirens passed. When I reached the scene, Robert's shoes were sticking out from under a white sheet as police technicians marked, studied, and measured the circumstances of his death. Later a chilling rumor circulated—that Robert, who

There were so many killings that they were like community socials. Neighbors shook hands and shook their heads. I remember hearing one say to another, "Hey, I didn't see you at last night's shooting."

was nineteen, saw his killer coming, knew he was about to die, and asked to be allowed to pray. So he knelt, and his executioner shot him in the head.

There have been so many killings that people's memories are fading. Some details still stand out, but I forget whose murder they relate to. After one shooting on Fifteenth Street an ice-cream truck pulled up with the bell ringing and found customers. Medics were working over the dying victim; they even cut off all his clothes, trying to save him. He lay there at Fifteenth and C, naked, while people on the other side of a yellow police tape ate ice cream.

At the scene of another shooting, near Fifteenth and C, a pair of athletic shoes lay by themselves in the middle of the intersection, one upright, the other lying on its side. The laces were still tied. The victim had literally run out of his shoes trying to escape. At another shooting the gunman was on a bicycle—a pedal-by shooting! Our shootings seemed to be developing a pathetic ordinariness, involving bicycles or worn tennis shoes. Parties unknown killed Emanuel "Push" Morgan on May 15, 1998, while he was riding a bicycle at the corner of Eighteenth and D Streets. Guns, killing, bicycles—it all slips seamlessly into our everyday life. The proprietors of a laundromat at Fifteenth and D once put up a sign saying, "Please empty pockets of pencils, hairpins, tools, nails, bolts, bullets, money, etc. These articles may damage the machines and hamper their efficient operation." Few people even noticed anything odd about this message. What kind of a world do I live in?

It didn't seem to matter that the sidewalk outside the New Dragon carryout at Fifteenth and C, at the end of my block, was one of the deadliest spots in our neighborhood—or in Washington. Victims were gunned down while they waited for cheeseburgers and fries. Yet people still order cheeseburgers and fries at the New Dragon, where the food is served through a transparent bulletproof lazy-Susan contraption that keeps at least the proprietors out of harm's way.

Near that corner, on May 12, 1992, Donte Octavious "Little Stink" Reed, nineteen, tried to escape an assailant by running up the front steps of a row house on C Street. Maybe the door looked open to Donte, but the occupants were inside. One later told me that he had pulled with all his might at the other end of the doorknob, fearing that the gunman would follow Donte into the living room. Donte died on the doorstep.

These deadly corners, Fifteenth and C and Fifteenth and D, border the Payne Elementary School playground. Many of our shooting victims—and some of our shooters, too—have been Payne alumni, which is not to say that Payne is a bad school. Test scores there are among the best in the city. Schools like Payne deserve more attention in our concern about violence. Murder came once to Columbine High School; it regularly encroaches on the lives of children at Payne. Hank Lloyd was nineteen when he was shot dead while talking to friends on the steps of a church at Sixteenth and D, on July 12, 1993. Only a few weeks earlier he had started working with kids at the Payne Recreation Center. A *Post* article on the shooting said that many of the thirty day-care children cried when they heard the news. On the night of the shooting Hank's father desperately implored the crowd at the scene, "Did anyone see anything?" But it seemed that no one had, or else people were afraid. Hank's murder is still unsolved.

Across Fifteenth Street from Payne, Mattie Smith, a woman in her thirties, was gunned down on the afternoon of March 26, 1997, in the alley beside Little People's Paradise, a nursery school. A teenage suspect was arrested. The case went to trial (the only trial I remember in all these cases), and the teenager was convicted. According to the evidence, the murder was drug-related; the kid thought that Smith owed him for drugs. So here was closure—one dead addict and one teenager convicted of murder.

With the help of police documents I calculate that twenty-three fatal shootings have occurred within a thousand feet of the Payne School since 1992. Four of those cases have been closed with an arrest, including the death of Officer White, but three cases were instances in which police officers shot civilians.

In such an environment, violence is an open wound. Visitors are shocked to see neighborhood kids acting out scenes of street violence as they play. Children six, seven, or eight pretend to shoot one another point-blank in the head. In my neighborhood the method of splattering someone's brains is picked up young.

Sometimes months pass between killings; then another occurs, adding some new twist to the way we recount our toll. When David Smith and Paul Watkins died, a friend noted that of the after-school youth basketball team she had organized in 1996 at Kentucky Courts, four members and a coach had

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been killed. Derek Williams was a coach; Smith, Watkins, and Robert Ward played on the team, as did Cory Lyles, who was killed on April 15, 1998, while sitting behind the wheel of a car in the alley behind the 1600 block of D Street.

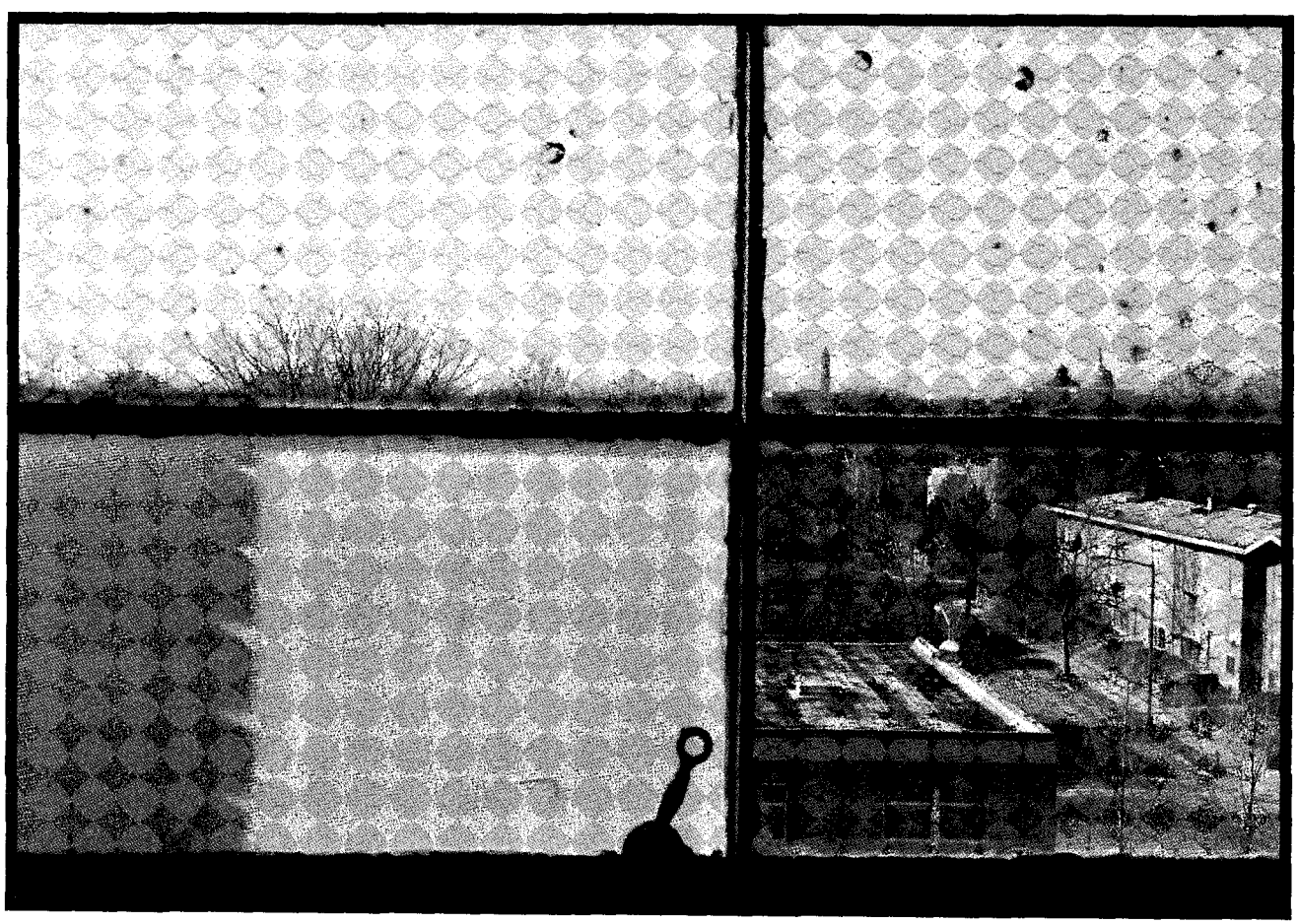
Cory was eighteen—and a special case. Many who knew him were surprised that he had survived so long, because he stood out even among those who were angry and reckless. We predicted his murder. He was in and out of trouble with the law. It's a strange feeling to predict that someone will be murdered and then to have it happen. We ignored our prescience—but what should we have done? That's what it's like in my neighborhood—you can take bets on who will be killed next.

In this case the rumor was that Cory's killer or killers had left a note citing the grievance with Cory. At Cory's funeral mourners wore T-shirts that said CORY—FREE TO FLY. From what I gathered at his wake, everyone but me knew who had shot him. There have been no arrests. Maybe someone decided that it was okay to kill Cory; it was well known that among his other sins, he had thrown a neighbor's dog off the roof of Kentucky Courts on September 9, 1996. The incident made the news when the Humane Society offered a $1,500 reward for information leading to the arrest of the perpetrator. Some residents at Kentucky Courts rushed to the phone. Others pointed out that no such offer—and rarely such a fuss—was made when *people* got killed. The dog, named Coco, survived the three-story fall, with a broken leg; she still hobbles around, a friendly and trusting dog. For a while the *Post* followed her progress. But when Cory was killed, there was no notice in the *Post* or on TV. Some people I talked to said that's the way it should be: someone who is cruel to animals deserves no sympathy.

Cory was full of violent, furious, tormented, awful ideas about dogs, girls, and everyone else. Some of those who knew him said that all the people he admired, including Coy Mason, had been killed. I remember having one moment of communion with Cory, in 1994, when Maurice "Mo" Davis was shot in the chest at Kentucky Courts. The medics were working over Maurice, and the situation didn't look good. He appeared to be unconscious, and a bloody froth was oozing out of his mouth; his friends were crying and hugging. Cory was there, looking miserable. His expression seemed to say that he wanted to cry like the other people. He hugged me at one point and made a whimpering sound. But the tears wouldn't come.

Maurice pulled through. The bullet that punctured his lung passed an inch from his heart. He was due some good luck. His mother had been murdered on July 26, 1990, when Maurice was sixteen. She had just testified before a grand jury about an armed robbery.

BULLET HOLES, ROOF LEVEL, PAYNE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL



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The Seduction of War

SUCH stories of violent death might seem more natural in a theater of war—and so they are. There has been a war in my neighborhood, and it's still going on. Maybe too many people think that this plague of violence has solely to do with crime, as thousands of acts of copycat lawbreaking involving TEC-9s, Glocks, and Uzis have spread across our cities. Maybe it would be wiser to conclude that this is a war like other wars. Often we find wars—especially other people's wars—hard to fathom; from a distance they can seem pointless, which fits the situation here. And wars are hard to stop once they get going and passions get loose.

Maybe my neighborhood is like the Balkans or some other corner of the world where war, once started, creates ever more reasons for continuing to fight. Definitely, one critical aspect of this warfare in our streets has been ignored: the powerful appeal that war has for young men whose recklessness is in flower. War draws young men into its orbit; it always has.

My neighborhood didn't raise a generation of cold-blooded killers or, as politicians say, criminals who put no value on human life. Our young men cannot be so different from young men elsewhere. It is true that neighborhoods like mine have lately produced an inordinate number of young people who don't have a clue about what they want to do with their lives. Blame the schools, the parents, TV, or the movies; the result is highly visible—sweeping aimlessness on our streets. We have men all over the place who are doing nothing productive. Some are angry and hopeless about the future. Some are at war with the way things are; their enemy is the system, order, the police, or people who've made something of their lives.

This area of Washington has also raised a few genuine sociopaths—scary youngsters like Henry "Little Man" James, a nineteen-year-old who shot a woman dead in a passing car on the nearby Anacostia Freeway because he "felt like killing someone." But most of the combatants are young men suckered into violence by the seductive appeal of warfare. And we've got far too many boys and men available for active duty.

Maybe my neighborhood is like the Balkans, where war creates ever more reasons for continuing to fight. War has an appeal for young men whose recklessness is in flower. War draws young men into its orbit.

Look down our streets day or night. One mile from the Capitol, at the moment of highest employment in decades, you'll find block after block of idle men. They've been marginalized, ostracized, abandoned. They are drained of hope and initiative. Perhaps with reason, America fears them—doesn't want them around. So they operate in the alleys and the shadows.

Urban warfare readily wins their hearts, because it is easy employment and seems exciting. Alternatives such as jobs are way off in Maryland or Virginia. The war zone is close by. The recruiting office is on the nearest corner. So are promises of camaraderie and adventure, surely a more thrilling option than stocking shelves at Kmart. Warring—shooting and being shot at—is also rich in irony: it makes you feel alive, especially if you are young and foolhardy enough to think you are immortal. And this war has romance: you can listen to veterans talk about the battles they've seen, about heroic deeds, about warriors who saved their buddies from certain death. It's a wonder they haven't started giving each other medals.

Meanwhile, girls who are similarly caught up in a search for engaging activities discover the romance of having babies with guys going off to war. Sometimes it is said that none of this living for the moment makes any sense. The problem is that it makes too much sense. Our children are doing what comes naturally; it makes at least as much sense as World War I.

Yet listening to some younger friends, including some who are no longer alive, I've been struck by a startling lack of ideas about what else they could do. Earlier warriors, like Coy and Derek, studied *Scarface*, the *Godfather* trilogy, and similar movies and learned about the applications of ruthlessness. Their lives became more like movies, and the movies became more like their lives. What was the difference between *Menace II Society* and our neighborhood? Not much.

Our warriors loved that movie, saw themselves in it, and recognized its message of doom as theirs, too. We had Hollywood-style car chases, gun battles, and crashes in our real lives. In one instance a potential murder victim in a car chase escaped on foot by running through the plate-glass window of the Safeway. What a movie scene that would have made.

The war on our streets had everything—from comradeship to adrenaline rushes—except nobility of purpose. Mainstream America moved closer to granting that last element, too, in its acceptance of gangsta rap, gangsta talk, and gangsta movies. America granted the warriors in my neighborhood their heroic pose, even if the values were upside down. Good was bad, bad was good.

But what can be noble about killing a woman who uses a wheelchair to get around? Where does that fit into the strategic plan? That's what happened on C Street, on May 30, 1992, when Kim Jones, age fifty-four, was shot to death in her car.

The police said that the shooting was drug-related, and there was never an arrest, but the case is closed, because the prime suspect was later murdered.

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MEET AAGE KRISTIANSEN: This Swedish scientist, trained at the renowned Gothenburg Technical Institute, joined Tempur-Pedic in 1989 at a critical time—when building the first weightless sleep system (with promising but unperfected aerospace materials) seemed impossible. Aage discovered the formula and perfected the process that saved the company's Tempur project from abandonment. His colleagues were euphoric! He was hailed as the "father" of the Tempur-Pedic revolution, which has fundamentally changed the way people sleep. Aage now lives in Sarö, a small coastal village 20 kilometers south of the city of Gothenburg.

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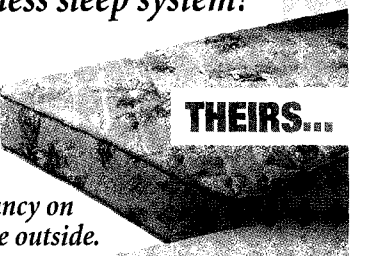

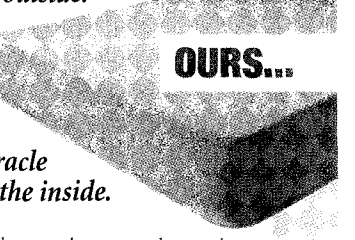

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Planning Your Funeral

I PRESS this idea of a war to make another point. War has social costs that linger after the band stops playing. Post-traumatic-stress disorder and other maladies of the psyche are with us now. It's only logical that people will be jumpy, edgy, depressed, angry, or pursued by demons. Maybe that explains what happened to Cory Lyles, who had seen more than his share of warfare. How many other children's lives are misshapen?

In 1993 *The Washington Post* ran an article headlined "GETTING READY TO DIE YOUNG; CHILDREN IN VIOLENT D.C. NEIGHBORHOODS PLAN THEIR OWN FUNERALS."

> Children as young as 10 have told friends how they want to be buried, what they want to wear and what songs they want played at their funerals. Some young people dictate what they want their mourners to wear and say they want their funeral floral arrangements to spell out the names of their favorite brands of clothing.

Some of these youngsters lived on my street. A psychologist told the *Post* that the behavior of my young neighbors was "extremely fatalistic." "Once they start planning their own funerals, they have given up," he said. "They are not trying to conquer death anymore." But here is good news to report: So far, to my knowledge, all the children in the article are still living. Their funeral plans are on hold.

Yet it is easily forgotten how many children have been left fatherless by all the killing. Derek Williams had a son. Coy Mason had two children; Coy II was born the day before his father's funeral and was held up before the gathering. One neighbor said the scene reminded her of the moment in *Roots* when the baby Kunta Kinte, the future patriarch, is held aloft.

Some details of the killings stand out, but I forget whose murder they relate to. After one shooting on Fifteenth Street an ice-cream truck pulled up with the bell ringing and found customers.

I wonder what destiny will call to Coy II if he grows up knowing that his father was gunned down by the police almost at the moment of his birth. What kind of legacy is that? I wonder what will happen to a five-year-old I know of who recently pointed to the courtyard at Kentucky Courts and said, "That's where my daddy got shot in the head."

One of my neighbors claims that more black men died in the D.C. area in the past decade than died in Vietnam. The statement isn't quite accurate, but it's close enough to make one realize how devastating the war in our streets has been. The list of black soldiers who died in Vietnam numbers around 7,000; the list of murder victims in the Washington area in the past decade or so numbers around 5,000, most of them black men. And there's a stigma attached to being one of D.C.'s fallen: people assume that you must have been doing something to invite your death. Your moral standing would be higher if you had been hit by a truck.

In 1995, before the Million Man March, Derek Williams and I and a few others made a T-shirt about the dead from around Kentucky Courts. LET THERE BE PEACE, it said. TOO MANY ARE MISSING. On the back were nine names: Ronald Jackson, 1962–1989; George "ET" Mimms, 1973–1990; Louis J. "Skip" Gilbert, 1972–1991; Tyrone Moore, 1970–1991; Jamal McCauley, 1973–1992; Coy Dontae Mason, 1972–1992; Reggie Plumber, 1969–1993; James "Nu-Nu" Roland, 1969–1993; Thaddeus Latta, 1972–1995.

The shirts became a memorial to those among the fallen who had no memorial. Many of the victims' friends wore them proudly; the shirts were a common sight in the neighborhood that year. Mothers and grandmothers also wanted shirts as keepsakes. As long as people were wearing the shirts, no one got killed, but this was probably coincidence. Eventually the killing picked up again, and for a while it was said after each death that we needed to make a new T-shirt. And then, recognizing that we weren't keeping up, people stopped saying that.

New killings came, but still there were few arrests, no trials. Nearby, at the Capitol, lawmakers railed on about law and order and how nobody is above the law. But our neighborhood slipped below the law, and the lawmakers didn't hear our gunshots.

Few Arrests, No Trials

I CANNOT attest to the nobility and innocence of the fallen I knew—or thought I knew. In the neighborhood it's considered wise to leave some questions unasked. Don't ask about the killings and you won't get answers you don't want to hear.

The police in D.C. frequently close cases in ways that are called "administrative" or "by other means"—that is, by means other than an arrest, such as when the prime suspect dies. But there is rarely a public accounting; we might never know or hear about it. A Freedom of Information Act request on such cases draws a polite response: the case is "closed" but "release of such information [the name of the alleged perpetrator] is prohibited because it would constitute an unwarranted invasion of privacy."

The November 19, 1992, murder of Theodore Fulwood, the brother of the former D.C. police chief Isaac Fulwood, was "solved" administratively. Because it was a high-profile case, the *Post* provided details gleaned from court transcripts: Ted-

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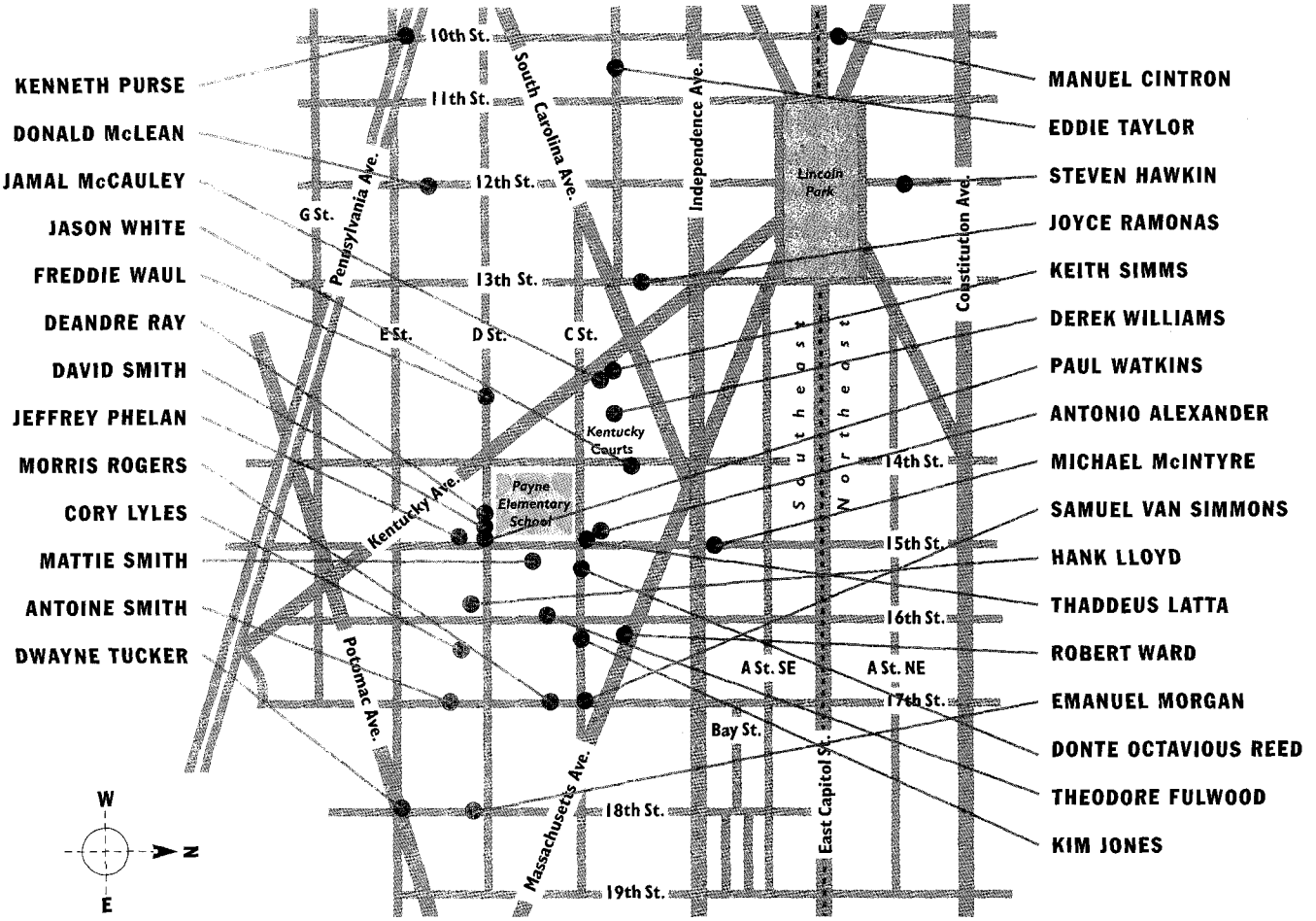

dy Fulwood died in front of 308 Sixteenth Street, and the case is closed because according to the police, the prime suspects were later murdered. They say that one was Rowmann Dildy, who was killed in April of 1993, and the other was Rowmann's cousin, Thaddeus Latta, the last name on our T-shirt. Both were raised at that cursed address, 1722 Bay Street.

According to the *Post*, court transcripts say that Rowmann, eighteen, and Teddy Fulwood, forty-three, were involved in an "altercation . . . over a drug transaction." Subsequently Rowmann and Thaddeus spotted Fulwood leaving a convenience store at the corner of Pennsylvania and Potomac Avenues at 3:00 A.M.; they jumped out of an alley with two handguns and shot him eleven times in the upper body and head. Thaddeus's friends at Kentucky Courts were quick to say that the police probably made up this story. Almost three years later, on June 23, 1995, Thaddeus, twenty-two, was killed at Fifteenth and C. His murder is unsolved.

I've heard about other information hidden in the police files; some of it scrambles my understanding of people I once saw every day. I had totally forgotten the July 3, 1996, murder of Antonio "Boo" Alexander, twenty-three, at Fifteenth and C. Or maybe I was away at the time. I had to ask people about this incident; Antonio's name didn't ring a bell. It appears in the *Washington Post* archives in connection with two incidents. A brief item on January 21, 1995, said that a warrant had been issued for Antonio's arrest as a "material fact witness" in the case of Jason White's murder. The *Post* said that Antonio appeared before a federal judge to swear that he had no information about the White case.

His name next appeared in the *Post* eighteen months later, three days after he was killed. Some in the neighborhood assume that he died because he was a witness in the White case. But those police files also say that his death is a closed case—closed administratively, and for the usual reason.

When I heard the name of the alleged killer, it was a shock, even though I've come to expect surprises in the plague of violence. The police believe that the killer was someone I thought I knew well. He had told me that he had found God, and had talked about the harm that the street war was doing to the community. And then he himself was killed on these streets. I remember the sadness at his funeral. The place was packed. I guess some of us just didn't know the whole story.

Kill Over Anything

ACCORDING to the folklore of murder, most homicides occur between people who know each other. This is true on our streets. Who killed Joyce Ramonas? Word was that she must have known the person and let him in, because there was no sign of forced entry. He shot her in her bed

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on January 2, 1997. The police files say that there was a sexual angle, but that aspect of the case was never publicized.

And why so many dead from Bay Street? We need a better explanation for such mysteries, but I suspect that the problem is in the family, so to speak. We imagine that today's urban violence involves battles over territory—turf. So it would seem that Bay Street people were warring against someone else—and Bay Street kept losing. But the story is not so simple.

Gun battles I've heard about could have arisen from almost anything, or almost nothing, such as incidents at nightclubs or jealousy over girls. Our neighborhood often got shot up because bad guys were stealing money, dope, or guns from other bad guys. During one stretch back around 1993 all the big shootouts started at crap games. But that doesn't explain everything either.

Many of our warriors were deeply suspicious people. Their families were broken and dysfunctional. Their mothers were addicts; their fathers were nowhere to be found. Kids were shuffled around, raised by grandparents or aunts. This jumble helped to produce a deeply suspicious world, which might be expected when families crumble. We need mothers and fathers; without these archetypal relationships to guide us, our expectations for all relationships are damaged. So it was that those who sensed themselves abandoned by their mothers and fathers soon expected others to abandon them as well. That is how the theme that *nobody cares* could reverberate so.

I've seen kids who seem to be raising themselves—among them a set of twins on C Street who were two years old at the time; I have never seen such independence so young. I cannot say it was good for toddlers to wander around so far from real nurturing. Eventually *place* becomes one's family. The fraternity of the young men who gathered in the courtyard at Kentucky Courts became the closest relationship some of them had.

The crews that gathered elsewhere were similar—tight and not so tight at the same time. They were a potentially volatile combination of contradictions. The camaraderie of war could bond these young men at one moment, but their underlying suspicions about the treachery of others worked in the opposite direction. To them, women were "bitches" and "hos"—and this lowdown talk bothered people who heard it leaping out from rap records. But it involved an unfortunate truth for many urban warriors; some of those I knew picked up the idea from watching their mothers.

On these streets we heard a common explanation for the killing and the turning on one another. My neighbors, who are not doctors or scientists, would cite laboratory studies of rats that turned hostile when crammed into too little space with

AFTER SCHOOL AT FIFTEENTH AND C

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too little food. These studies are part of urban folklore; even high school dropouts cite them. Thus our neighborhood is understood as a huge experiment in which we've all been crammed together in too little space with too few resources to go around.

Who is the enemy in a war like this? The warring laboratory rats are their own enemies. And my neighbors are largely killing one another, a generation tearing itself apart. Such is the prevailing level of mistrust that quick flashes of envy or suspicion can fuel homicide. We are always ready for puzzling events: recently, at the end of a car chase and shooting in which no one was killed, the victims crashed into a tree. Thereafter they insisted that they had no idea why anyone would shoot at them—which is entirely possible. Didn't Henry "Little Man" James shoot at someone in a car simply because he felt like it?

So it may seem that people are being killed for no reason, but we look for order and logic or any thread of sense we can find. On June 30, 1989, Angela "Daughter" Jones, a fifty-five-year-old woman, died after being gunned down in her home on the 1700 block of Massachusetts Avenue because, the story goes, she had quite accidentally witnessed another slaying nearby. In the strange way of our neighborhood, her death made sense: a witness was silenced.

I did not know Angela Jones, but I feel connected to her in ways that are possible only in a violent place. She is part of a chain of events I now know about because of the claims hidden in those police files: I now realize that in 1993 I saw the dead body of the person who the police believe killed her. And the chain did not stop there. In 1997 I saw the body of the person the police files say was responsible for the killer's death—and both these people were raised on the 1700 block of Bay Street. They were supposed to be on the same side. But so it goes in our great experiment.

WHY am I not surprised to find that studies on urban violence say witnessing violence begets more violence? Of course it does. Does it require a Ph.D. to discover this? Bring us peace and it will surely beget more peace. Some people I know wonder why I follow these deaths so closely. It seems unnatural. Why don't I just move—the sensible thing? But I am a journalist, and after more than twenty-five years this has shaped my habits. Journalists follow fire engines and go to shooting scenes.

Watching closely, I sense my community becoming ever more numbed, trying to push the reality of these deaths away. But the strategy doesn't work. This past June 4, Dennis Dolinger, a community activist and another friend, was murdered in his home, three blocks from mine. The police said it was an awful scene; they couldn't tell if Dennis had been shot or beaten to death. Initially they insisted that the murder was not drug-related, and they found no signs of forced entry. Mayor Anthony Williams, the former mayor Marion Barry, and other local dignitaries spoke at the memorial service for Dennis. In January blood evidence led to a murder charge against Raymond Jenkins, who, court papers say, was seen with items reportedly taken from Dolinger's house.

On November 27 of last year the bloodshed returned to Fifteenth and D, where Paul Watkins and David Smith had been killed in February. At 3:15 on a post-Thanksgiving Saturday afternoon persons unknown in a burgundy vehicle opened fire—one shooter with an AK-47—on Deandre Ray and Jumar Adarr, two teenagers who were sitting in a 300ZX sports car. Ray was dead on arrival at the hospital.

Ray's mother, who lived a block away, rushed to the scene. Her screams stood out in the cacophony of sirens. That's a detail I expect to remember.

But now I am battling against the inevitable: many of these cases will soon cross over into the netherworld of the forgotten. What little significance they once had will evaporate. And though it's in human nature to forget, to move on, it just doesn't seem right to do so easily. On several occasions I have put up posters about the killings. In 1998 I put up one that listed six unsolved murders and asked, "WHY NO ARRESTS?" Nothing happened; my reward was that neighbors said they had wondered about that too. Some credited me for caring. After the February 13 double homicide last year, I made another poster: it featured Frederick Douglass saying "Stop the killing!" What would Douglass think of a generation that is killing itself off in the prime of life?

I also called the Fox TV show *America's Most Wanted*. I thought it might help to put the issue of violence in perspective if one Saturday night John Walsh, the program's host, said, "We need your help tonight in solving eighteen murders in a neighborhood a few blocks from the U.S. Capitol." That's all I wanted.

America's Most Wanted sent a TV crew and a reporter named Lena Nozizwe from Los Angeles. She walked our streets and talked to neighbors about the killings. Some neighbors stared incredulously at her. She looked like a movie star to them. The surviving members of the gang in black hoods chose to slink away, which seemed a strange response. When I teased Lena Nozizwe that Fox TV had sent Hollywood to interview us, she protested. She said that she had been born in a hut in a village in Malawi, and that her family had come to America when she was a child.

I've been asking myself what Frederick Douglass would think. One might also wonder what Lena Nozizwe thinks about the warfare in my neighborhood. She comes from Africa and has done eminently well; she looks at herself as living proof that you can achieve what you want to in life. Yet many of my neighbors can't see any possibilities beyond the corners where they live and die. How crazy is that? For the moment I am embarrassed.

What good thing can I say about my country?

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The Third Generation

by TOVA REICH

THIS was not the first time that the father-and-son team Maurice and Norman Messer, respectively chairman of the board and president of Holocaust Connections, Inc., had traveled home from Poland, but it was definitely the saddest. In all their business dealings for clients they had always come through with flying colors, which was how they had built their enviable reputation and their legendary success. But this time, in a most painful personal matter involving an exceedingly close member of their immediate family, indeed, the very future of their line, they had failed completely. Nechama, only child of an only son, had absolutely refused to see her father or her grandfather, either one-on-one or in any constellation. In any case, as they were categorically informed, she had taken a vow of silence. This was communicated to the two men by a matronly nun in sunglasses, who came to meet them outside the gate of the Carmelite convent—the new convent, that is, a little farther back from the perimeter of the Auschwitz death camp, to which the nuns had moved after all that fuss. "Sister Consolatia asks that you respect her right to choose," the nun told them with finality, in English, though Maurice of course knew Polish. Hearing the signature phrasing, the Messers, father and son, could not deceive themselves that this was anything other than a direct quotation from their apostate offspring, their lost Nechama, now reborn as Sister Consolatia.

Nevertheless, despite their unquestionably genuine and heartbreaking disappointment, they made themselves comfortable, as usual, in their ample seats in the first-class compartment of the LOT airplane. They always flew Polish, as a matter of policy, to maintain healthy relations with the government with which they had so many dealings; and they always flew first class, because to do otherwise would be unseemly for men like themselves, steeped as they were in such nearly mythic tragic history, a history that set them apart from ordinary people and therefore required that they be seated apart. And from a practical, business point of view, to go economy would look bad, as if their enterprise were falling on hard times. Everything in their line of work, naturally, hung on image. "Look," as Norman formulated it, with the pauses and swallows that usually heralded the delivery of one of his aphorisms, "we already did cattle cars. From now on it's first class all the way." Clients expected a premium operation from the Messers, and were billed accordingly. This trip, for example, had been paid for by an anti-fur organization that was eager to firm up its honorary Holocaust status, and Norman had managed, even in the midst of his private anguish, to do a little work for them, still in its early stages, admittedly, involving the creative use of the mountains of hair in the Auschwitz museum, shorn from the gassed victims—a ghoulish idea on the face of it, which he was now massaging

She was a Holocaust princess, their living memorial candle, continuity. Who would have predicted that she would turn her back on her people to become a nun in, of all places, the convent at Auschwitz?

Illustrations by John Howard

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and dignifying in order to establish the relevant ethical connection that would ennoble the agenda of the fur account and give it that moral stamp of the Holocaust.

By now, of course, father and son knew all the flight attendants on the airline. Maurice persisted in referring to them, politically incorrectly, as "hoistesses," a teasing liberty for which he took the precaution of propitiating them, just in case, with little offerings from the luxury hotels of Warsaw and Kraków—miniature shampoos or scented soaps from the bathrooms, chocolate hearts wrapped in gold foil plucked off the pillows. He squeezed and harassed their vivid blondeness and springy buxomness hello and good-bye and thank you, muttering, "Don't worry, girls, don't worry, I'm safe."

"And he gets away with it, too," Norman painstakingly and unnecessarily explained to his wife, Arlene, "because he's this cute little tubby old bald Jewish guy with pudgy hands and a funny accent, and the dumb chicks from Czestochowa, they think he's harmless—big mistake, ladies!—so it turns into a stereotypical Polish joke."

They boarded the plane ahead of the common passengers, wearing to the very last minute their trademark trench coats—the sexy semiotics, as Maurice and Norman interpreted it, of international mystery and intrigue. Then one of the attendants, Magda or Wanda or someone, without even inquiring, her brain imprinted with their preferences as if the storage of such information were her reason for existence, glided forward with a welcoming smile such as had long vanished from their wives' repertoires, bearing in front of her two living and breathing breasts a tray with their usual—for Maurice, a glass of Bordeaux ("I'm a red-wine male," he liked to confide urbanely at official functions), for Norman, rum with Coca-Cola, two containers of chocolate milk, and a dozen bags of honey-roasted peanuts.

FOR a long time they sat side by side in silence, each with his own thoughts, perfectly at ease with the other, apart yet joined, Norman tearing open with his teeth pack after pack of the peanuts, pouring them out into the ladle of his palm, jiggling them around like dice, and then, with his head tilted slightly back, dumping them into his mouth with a smack. He went on doing this automatically, mechanically. Dispatching the nuts this way was okay when he traveled alongside his father. The old man didn't mind, most likely didn't even notice; like most survivor parents, he probably just registered gratefully that at least his son was eating, and for Norman, it was a stolen pleasure, because this was not a snacking style in which he could ever have indulged had he been with his wife or daughter. That robotic, cranelike up-and-down motion of his arm drove the two of them crazy; they could feel its vibration even if they weren't looking directly at him. Maybe that's why Nechama went into the convent, Norman speculated—because of his annoying habits.

As for Arlene, well, he was just not going to think about his upcoming meeting with her while he was masticating. He simply refused even to begin to plan how he would manage her on the Nechama problem when he got home, how he would confirm that, unfortunately, it looked, at least for the time being, as if this nun thing was a done deal. They could do nothing about it for the moment except, of course, to use Arlene's idiom, go on being supportive, love their daughter unconditionally, always be there for her, but, at the same time, they needed to allow time to grieve—figuratively grieve, that is, not actually go into mourning by sitting shiva for seven days, like those ultra-Orthodox fanatics when one of their kids converted—and then, of course, they'd need closure, they'd need to move on with their own lives, to let go of all this bad stuff, put it behind them, give the healing process a chance to work, blah blah.

"Look at it this way," he could say to Arlene. "The bad news is, it's a fact: she's a nun, so that makes her a Christian, I guess, a goy, a shiksa, even worse, a Catholic. We just have to face it. And also it's a problem, I suppose, that she had to go and pick that Carmelite convent right by Auschwitz, of all places, for her nun phase, where three quarters of our family were incinerated. Know what I mean? On the other hand"—and here he would slow down and suck in air for greater effect—"the good news is, she's safe, she has a guaranteed roof over her head and food to eat every day, guys can't bother her anymore, and, from a parent's point of view, we will now always know exactly where she is at all times."

Hey, he loved the girl as much as Arlene did, Norman thought resentfully. Why was he always the one on the defensive? Did he really need this added grief? Nechama was his daughter too, for God's sake. This whole mess was no less an embarrassment for him than it was for Arlene. Jesus, this could even impact their business, their lifestyle—you hear that, Mrs. Messer, hel-lo? How was it going to look, he demanded of his wife in his head: "HOLOCAUST HEIRESS DUMPS JEWS"? It was an emergency damage-control situation requiring a rapid response. He had to figure out some way to market this negative to their advantage, to turn it around—something like, you know, the ongoing trauma of the Holocaust, the continuing threat to our survival, the Holocaust is not yet over, et cetera et cetera.

No problem; he was prepared to deal with it. But there was one thing he wanted to know, just one thing—why was he always the one who had to be, as Arlene would put it, supportive, like some Goddamn jockstrap? Why couldn't she be supportive of him once in a while for a change? Had it penetrated her ozone layer yet that everywhere her poor schlump of a husband went, he was a big man, he was greeted like a hero? Was she cognizant of that fact? In Warsaw the women adored him, especially since he had lost all that weight; but the fact is, over there they had always loved him, they loved him in any shape or form, they loved him for himself. They came up to his hotel room carrying bouquets of flowers and bottles of champagne, with beautifully made-up faces and beautifully

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sprayed hair, in shiny high-heeled shoes and gorgeous real-leather mini-dresses with exposed industrial-strength steel zippers running from neck to hem—not that he carped the diem, needless to say. In the States they worshipped him, idolized him for his aura of suffering, like a saint, like a holy man out of Dostoevski. They revered him for never letting up on this miserable Holocaust business, for immersing himself in it every minute, for schlepping the Shoah around on his back day and night, for sacrificing his happiness to keep the flame going—not for his own health, obviously, but for the moral and ethical health of humankind. The anguish in his eyes, the melancholy in the set of his mouth, the manifest depression in the way he blow-dried his hair, the sorrowful awareness of man's inhumanity to man in the way he belted his trench coat—it turned them on, yes, it turned them on.

So big deal, his wife didn't appreciate him. So what else was new? She was happiest when he was away from home, that was obvious; she was delighted that his job required so much traveling. Fine, he could live with that, too, as long as somebody appreciated him, as long as someone somewhere was glad to see him once in a while and showed him a little respect. But it was another thing entirely to blame him for the whole fiasco. C'mon, was he the one who put the kid in the nunnery? Please! And why was he going home now, of his own free will, to listen to all that garbage? He must be meshugga. It was masochism, pure and simple, a sick craving for punishment—he should see a shrink. Did he have any doubts whatsoever about what Arlene was going to dump on him, with her squeegee social worker's brain and her prepackaged psychological explanations? Oh, it was an old song; he had heard it a thousand times already. She would start in again with the whole bloody litany—how it was all his fault, everything that had happened was his fault. Right from the start. First of all, what kind of sick idea was it to insist on naming a baby Nechama? A poor, innocent baby, to give her a name like Comfort, as in "Comfort ye, comfort ye, oh my people," like some sort of replacement Jew, like some sort of post-catastrophe consolation prize, as if they were all depending on her to make things right again after the disaster. Such a heavy load, such an impossible burden to saddle a kid with—no wonder the poor girl took herself out of this world. Did he think names don't matter? There was a whole literature on the subject, on the effect of names on development and identity and self-image. What kind of father would do such a thing to his own flesh and blood? It was criminal, unforgivable. Why couldn't she have been given a normal name, some sort of hopeful, pursuit-of-happiness American name that people could at least pronounce, like Stacy, or Tracy?

And then this whole second-generation business that he had gotten himself involved with, dragging Nechama along like some sort of archetypal sacrificial lamb, like Jephthah's daughter, like Iphigenia. As a matter of fact, Norman knew very well that most mental-health types just loved the second-generation concept. They ate it up. But Arlene—surprise, surprise—didn't believe in it at all. Why? It was completely predictable: because it served Norman's agenda, that's why, because it legitimized and explained his obsession, and gave it status. There was nothing in it for Arlene. As far as Arlene was concerned, second generation was a made-up category, an indulgence for a bunch of whiners and self-pitiers with a terminal case of arrested development. The so-called survivors were the first generation; they were the ones who had been there, had experienced it all firsthand, and after them came their children, this bogus second generation, the survivor proxies, these Holocaust hangers-on, Norman and company, throwing a tantrum for a piece of Shoah action. So all those tough, shrewd, paranoid refugees who came out of the war—you don't even want to begin to think about how they made it through—suddenly they get turned into sacred, saintly survivors with unutterable knowledge, and then the second generation, born and reared in Brooklyn or somewhere, far, far from the gas chambers and the crematoria, gets crowned as honorary survivors. Suddenly these lightweight descendants are endowed with gravitas, with importance, with all the seriousness and rewards that come from sucking up to suffering. What could be neater? All the benefits of Auschwitz without having to actually live through that nastiness.

And what did they do to deserve this honor, this second

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generation? What exactly are their suffering bona fides? Well, they had it rough, poor babies—they are victims too, you can't take it away from them. They suffered the psychic wounds of being raised by traumatized, overprotective parents with impossible expectations. They bore the weight of having to transmit the torch of memory, that kitschy memorial candle, from past to future. They endured a devastating blow to their self-esteem in consequence of the knowledge that their lives were a paltry sideshow compared with their parents' epic stories. It was sick, sick, pathetic—"Holocaust envy," a new term in the profession, coming your way soon in the updated, revised edition of *DSM-IV*. And to think that he would expose his own child to such a pathological situation—to think he'd go ahead now and render this acute condition chronic by prolonging the agony, by trying to pass the whole load on to Nechama like a life sentence, like indentured servitude, like guilt unto the tenth generation. Was it an accident, then, that she abandoned the Jews for the ultimate martyr religion, complete with vicarious suffering as its main value and a tortured skinny guy on a cross as its main icon? Was it an accident that she found her way back to the gates of Auschwitz? Had it never dawned on him where this morbid Holocaust fixation would lead?

MAYBE we should've come with one of those deprogramming fellas," Maurice was now saying. "Maybe we should've climbed the wall from the convent like that crazy rabbi—what's his name?—when it used to be in the other building where they used to keep the gas in the war. Maybe we should've kidnapped her from the *schwesters*."

Norman shook his head. "Bad idea, Pop." He swallowed portentously before elaborating. "It would have been disastrous for Polish-Jewish relations, a nightmare for Catholic-Jewish relations, not to mention curtains for business relations."

"Nu. Anyway, you have to be a younger man for that kind of monkey business, climbing walls. You know what I mean? And you're not so young anymore, Normie, ha ha, and I'm not in such good shape—like your mama says, svelte. I'm not so svelte like I used to be when I was a leader from the partisans and fought against the Nazis in the woods."

Norman had to catch his breath and squeeze the bridge of his nose to stem the keen rush of longing for his daughter that swept over him at that moment, as Maurice recited the familiar refrain in exactly those words about having been a partisan leader who fought the Nazis in the woods. It was a private joke between Norman and Nechama. They would mouth those exact words every time Maurice uttered them, flawlessly imitating his grimaces and gestures, mouth them behind the old man's back at gatherings with friends and family or even at the public speeches that he regularly gave in synagogues, community centers, and schools about his career as a resistance fighter, which he always began with the sentence "I'm here to debunk the myth that the Jews went like sheep to the shlaughter." Norman and Nechama would mouth this sentence, too, in fits of choking, mute hilarity. It was a harmless father-daughter ritual that had started when she was about eighteen or nineteen years old, after Maurice had given his standard talk, at Nechama's invitation, in her college's Jewish students' center, opening, as usual, with that sentence about the sheep-to-the-slaughter myth, and ending, as usual, by snapping smartly to attention when they played the Partisans' Hymn, "Never Say That You Have Reached the Final Road."

In a moment alone with Nechama during the reception following Maurice's talk, the two of them facing each other with their clear-plastic wineglasses filled with sparkling cider, as if playing a couple just introduced at a social gathering, Norman casually mentioned—in another context entirely, he forgot what—that of course nobody really knew exactly what Maurice Messer had done during the Holocaust except that he had hidden in the woods all day and stolen chickens at night. No shame in that, of course, under the circumstances. "You just gotta face it, kiddo," Norman went on, in the grip of something beyond his control, "he never shot in the woods—he shat in the woods!"

"You mean Grandpa wasn't really a partisan leader who fought the Nazis?" The child seemed genuinely shocked.

Norman raised an eyebrow. His daughter was not being ironic. Maybe he had gone too far this time. Maybe she really was an innocent; maybe she was just too fragile for this kind of realpolitik. Incredibly, it looked as if she truly hadn't fathomed until that moment that her grandfather's story was just an innocuous piece of self-promoting fiction. But when, after a long pause to absorb the new information, she mischievously blurted out, "Okay, Dad, I won't be the one to tell the Holocaust deniers that it's all made up," he breathed again with relief, impressed by how quickly she had caught on, how alert she was to where her interests lay and her loyalties belonged, how sophisticated she was in accepting human weakness as another amusing fact of life.

"Look," Norman intoned, "it's not as if he didn't really suffer. You think it's easy being considered a victim all the time, having people feel sorry for you—especially if you're a macho type like Grandpa? Who's going to be hurt by an old man's little screenplay starring himself as the big hero? Tell me that, please." He slowed down emphatically now to make way for the flourish. "The Holocaust market is not about to collapse due to one old man's inflations, trust me. Those loonies who say the whole thing never happened should not take comfort."

Should not take comfort, he had said—not take *nechama*. Anyway, it was from that time on, as he recalled it, that they engaged in their tradition of delicious mockery, all in affectionate fun, whenever Maurice warmed up and delivered his partisan spiel. It had evolved into their own personal father-daughter thing. And it was the memory of this innocent conspiratorial bonding with his child that took possession of him now and overcame him.

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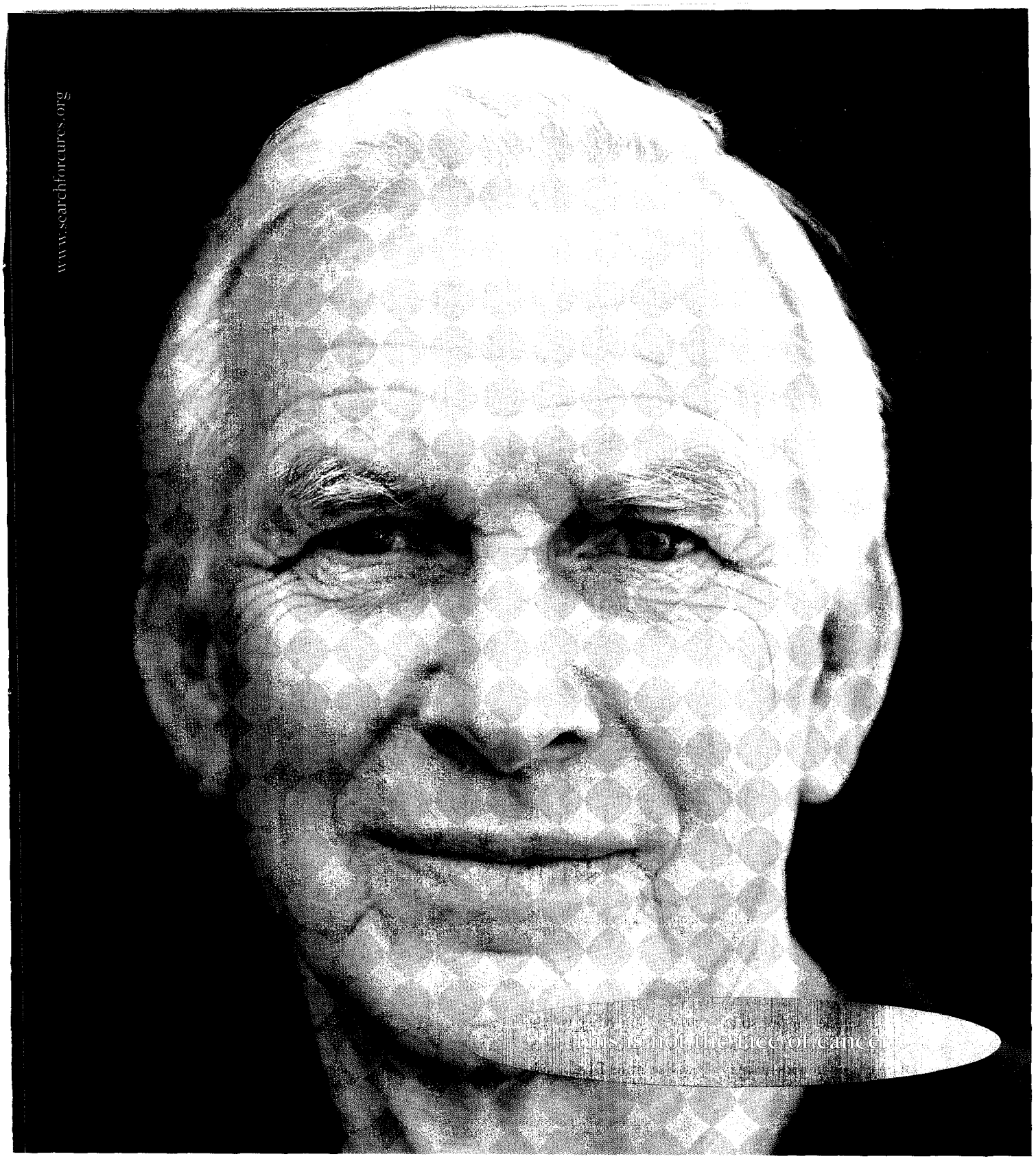

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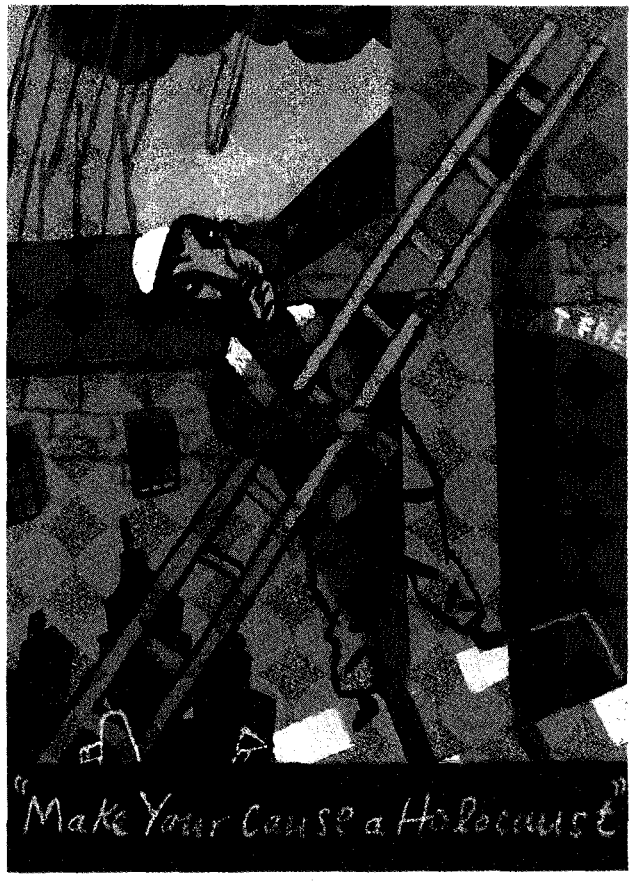
NU, Normie," Maurice was saying. "Yes or no? Why you not talkin'? You remember that hoo-hah with the *schwesters* at the convent with that crazy rabbi, like your mama calls him?"

Maurice, whenever possible, liked to quote his wife, to whom he gallantly conceded a superior mastery of English idiom and pronunciation, and whom he regarded as a nearly oracular source of common sense. For example, whenever the subject came up of that rabbi who had caused an international incident with his protest against the presence of a Catholic convent at Auschwitz, where a million Jews had been gassed—the very same convent in which, in a more acceptable location ordained by the Pope himself, their granddaughter Nechama was now a nun praying for the salvation of the souls of the Jewish dead—Blanche would open her eyes wide and exclaim, "But, darling, he's crazy!" In consequence, Maurice never failed, when referring to that event at the old Carmelite convent, to include the epithet "that crazy rabbi"—as if the rabbi's mental state were a genuine clinical diagnosis, because Blanche, with her peerless common sense, had declared it to be so. Common sense, in Maurice's opinion, was an exceedingly desirable quality in a woman, and there was a time when he had advised Norman to put it at the top of his list of qualities in choosing a mate. To which Blanche would always remark coyly, "When they tell you a girl has common sense, that's a code for not so ay-yay-yay—in other words, not so pretty." "Common sense together with pretty," Maurice would then chime in with alacrity, "just like mine Blanchie."



They discussed everything, he and Blanche, even the subjects they did not discuss. They discussed but did not discuss, for instance, their shared sense of the limitations of their Norman's capabilities. It was not an understanding that they cared to seal in words. But around the time they sold their ladies'-undergarments company, Messers' Foundations, from which they had made a more than comfortable living, the Holocaust had become fashionable, more fashionable even than padded brassieres and spandex girdles. At first the two of them had booked up their retirement by becoming leaders in the survivor community and popular lecturers on the oral-testimony circuit. The Holocaust was hot, no question about it. Blanche then urged Maurice to start the consulting business, Holocaust Connections, Inc., and to take Norman in as an equal partner. "Make Your Cause a Holocaust," as their smart-aleck Norman packaged it; he was just too much. It would be first and second generation working and playing together, an ideal setup, a perfect outlet for their Norman, the original futzer and putzer, as they lovingly called him, whose jobs until then, they agreed, had been totally beneath him, totally unsatisfactory and unchallenging. Now Norman could hang around all day long, talking creatively with clients on the telephone, holding forth with all his brilliant opinions, cracking his wicked jokes, writing an article now and then for a Jewish newspaper, traveling and schmoozing in diplomatic channels and the corridors of power with all the other politicians and insiders—the best possible use of his considerable gifts and talents. Unspoken was their shared sense that Norman needed their help, that fundamentally he was a weak person, that he could never manage on his own. Never mind that he had gone to Princeton University—Princeton, Shminceton!—where he had even taken part in a sit-in in the president's office for three days and nights, though his mother had marched right into the middle of that nonstop orgy to personally hand him his allergy medicine. Never mind that he had a law degree from Rutgers, where they trained poor schlemiels to become a bunch of creepers and crawlers. Never mind that he was an adult, to all appearances a grown man, with a social-worker wife and a beautiful but moody daughter. They knew in their hearts that if the war broke out tomorrow, their Norman would never make it. Without saying it out loud, they recognized that, unlike themselves, Norman would not have survived.

SURVIVAL—that was the bottom line. You couldn't argue with it. It was the fact on the ground that separated the living from the dead. That was the lesson they had struggled to drum into their Norman: first you survive, then you worry about such niceties as morality and feelings. When someone tells you he's going to kill you, you pay attention,

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you take him seriously, you believe him. You wake up earlier the next morning and you kill him. If you survive, you win. If you don't survive, you lose. If you lose, you're nothing. What is Rule No. 1 for survival? Never trust anyone. Suspect everyone. Take it as a given that the other guy is out to destroy you, and eat him alive before he gets the chance. Why had they survived? Luck, they always said. It was luck. But they didn't believe it for a minute. It was the accepted thing to say, so as not to insult the memory of the ones who hadn't survived, the ones who were now piles of gray ash and crushed bone that people stepped on. The real truth, they knew, was that they had survived because they were stronger, better—fitter. Look at the survivors today, the ones who had staggered out of the camps like the living dead. They were your classic greenhorns, eternal immigrants, afraid to offend by harping on the Holocaust—why make a federal case of it?—a bunch of nobodies until they had their consciousness raised by the survivor elite, by Blanche and Maurice's circle, the ones who survived with style, the fearless ones. "Me? I'm never afraid!" Maurice always said. It was his motto. Now, thanks to them, the Holocaust was a household word. They built monuments and museums. They were millionaires, big shots, movers and shakers. They ran the country. Survival of the fittest. Blanche had once read in a magazine that cancer cells were the fittest form of life, because they ate everything else up, they spread, they reproduced, they survived, they won. Maybe this wasn't such a wonderful example; maybe this didn't reflect so nicely on her and Maurice and the rest—to be compared to cancer. Cancer was bad, but in this world if you survive, you win, and if you win, you're good.

They were a formidable team, Blanche and Maurice Messer, a fierce couple, and proud of it. For their fortieth wedding anniversary Norman and Arlene had given them a plaque engraved with the words "Don't Mess With the Messers," which they hung in "Holocaust Central," their den off the living room, right above the composition that Nechama had written when she was eight years old, in third grade. The topic was "My Hero"; Nechama had chosen Maurice.

> Grandpa had a gun in World War II. He killed bad Germans with the gun. He was a Germ killer. He saved the Jewish people. He loved the gun. He kissed the gun goodnight every night. He slept with the gun. After the war they gave Grandpa a ride on a tank. He was holding the gun. Then they took the gun away. Grandpa was sad. He cried because he missed his gun. So he married Grandma.

The teacher gave her only a "Fair" for this effort, but Blanche said, "What does she know? It's not by accident that she's a teacher," and she hung the composition, expensively framed, on the wall. "I'm the gun," she asserted defiantly. Maurice also didn't care much for this composition. "What for is she telling the *ganze velt* this partisan story? It's private, just for family." "What are you worrying about, Maurie?" Blanche said. "Every survivor is a partisan. Survival is resistance." "Don't be so paranoid, Pop," Norman said. "It's safe to come out of the closet now." Then, swallowing deliberately and pausing pregnantly, he added, "Ziggy and Manny and Feivel and Yankel, and everyone else who was with you in the woods in those days, they're all dead by now, may they rest in peace—and quiet."

Again, it was a question of survival, this time the survival of the Jewish people in an age of assimilation and intermarriage and the mixed-blessing decline of anti-Semitism in America—another Holocaust, frankly, even more dangerous in its way because it was insidious, underground. Blanche and Maurice would do anything to ensure Jewish survival. No effort or sacrifice was too great, and, as they knew very well, nothing could compare to the Holocaust for bagging a straying Jew; it was the best seller, it was the top of the line, it got the customer every time. Why did God give us the Holocaust? For one reason only: to drive home the lesson that once a Jew, always a Jew. You could try to blend in and fade out, you could try to mix and match, but it was all useless, hopeless. There was no place to hide, no way to run. Hitler would find you wherever you were and flush you out like a cockroach.

And what could be more effective in sending this message loud and clear than a partisan leader and his wife—herself a survivor of three death camps, maybe four, depending on how you counted—telling their story over and over again until they were blue in the face, pounding in nonstop, day and night, the lessons of the Holocaust. Whatever it took to beat in the message, even if it meant pushing themselves into the limelight in crude ways that ran thoroughly counter to their refined nature, even if it meant giving the misleading impression that they were exploiting the dead, they would do it, not for personal fame and glory, God forbid, but for the cause, because this was their mission. This was why they had been chosen. This was the reason they had survived. They were the first generation, the eyewitnesses. Norman was the connecting link. Nechama was continuity.

YES, continuity. She was their designated kaddish, their living memorial candle, the third generation. And now she was a Christian. This was tragic—tragic! How could it have happened? Who could ever have foreseen such an outcome? It was beyond human imagining. They had thrown everything they had into that girl. She had always been the ideal apprentice and protégée. She was, as Maurice used to say in his speeches, the spitting image of his mother, Shprintza Chaya Messer the guerrilla fighter, shot down by the Nazis during the roundup in Wieliczka while she screamed at the top of her lungs, "Fight, Yidalech, fight!"

To this day people still talked about Nechama's bat-mitzvah speech—how she had turned to address the ghost of the Vilna girl with whom she had insisted on being twinned with the words "Rosa, my sister, you were cruelly cut down by the Nazis during the Holocaust. You never had a bat mitzvah. To-

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day I give back to you what was so wrongfully taken away—because today I am you." Arlene, with her naive American Oh-say-can-you-see attitude, had called this gruesome, morbid, a form of child abuse, and had walked out of the sanctuary, but everyone else felt spiritually uplifted and morally renewed by Nechama's words, and wept contentedly. And who could forget the Holocaust assemblies that Nechama had organized in high school, at which either Maurice or Blanche gave testimony? Once even Norman, as the ambassador of the second generation, addressed the teenagers, with their yellow paper stars for Jews pinned to their Nine Inch Nails T-shirts, their pink triangles for homosexuals, black triangles for Gypsies. Especially, who could forget Nechama's original dance composition, presented each year, "Requiem for the Absent," with the flowing, twisting scarves and the arms reaching poignantly toward the heavens? She had always been so proud of her family, those Holocaust relics who would have mortified your average adolescent, and had even invited her grandparents and her father to accompany her to Poland for the March of the Living, with thousands of other Jewish girls and boys from all over the world—but she was in a class apart. She was a Holocaust princess. And she wasn't ashamed of the VIP treatment that she received because of her family's position in the Holocaust hierarchy, and she wasn't embarrassed to walk at a slower pace alongside the old folks for the three-kilometer march from Auschwitz to the actual killing center in Birkenau, with its remains of gas chambers and crematoria, and ash and powdered bone underfoot. She had turned to them and said—they would never forget it—"I see them, I hear them, I feel them. The dead are walking beside us." And then, in her essay for her college application, she had written, "The one thing about me that you may or may not have learned so far from this application is that I am, in the most positive and constructive sense, a Holocaust nut. What this means is that I am totally obsessed by the Holocaust, the murder of six million of my people, and am determined to do everything in my power to make sure that these dead shall not have died in vain." "Beautiful, beautiful," Maurice had declared, "like the Star Spangled Banana!" She was rejected by Princeton, even though she was legacy, because deep down they were, as Maurice put it, "a bunch of anti-Semitten and shtinkers." So she went to Brown.

With such Holocaust credentials, who would ever have predicted that she would turn her back on her people and become, of all things, a nun? Convent and continuity—these were two concepts that definitely did not go together. They did not mix well. They were not a natural couple. The idea of a nun was very foreign to Jewish thinking. Among Jews every girl got married one way or another, every girl had children, and if one didn't—well, that just never happened. Who ever heard of such a thing? Ever since she was a little girl, she had talked so movingly about how she would have at least twelve children to help make up for the millions who had been murdered—hurled alive into flaming pits, shot, gassed, their heads bashed against stone walls. She was going to be a baby machine for Jewish continuity. She was a pretty girl, everyone remarked—a little full, maybe. "Zaftig," Maurice said. "Baby fat," Blanche said. Her favorite food, according to family lore, was marzipan, and even that preference was regarded as a sign of her superiority. It was so European, so Old World—what ordinary American Mars Bars kid knows from marzipan? The boys who were attracted to her were usually considerably older, usually foreigners. One of the family's favorite stories was about how she had stayed out very late one night, and when she finally came home, at five in the morning, her excuse to her worried parents was that this Salvadoran guy named Salvador had asked her out, and she didn't want to hurt his feelings, so she had to explain to him that she could never date a non-Jew because of the Holocaust—it was nothing personal, but her duty was to replace the six million. And then, of course, she had to tell him the whole history of the Holocaust, so that he'd understand where she was coming from—starting with Hitler's rise to power, in 1933, and continuing to the end of World War II, in 1945, which took a long time. Which was why she was so late. She hoped they weren't mad. "So what did Salvador say?" Norman had asked, obviously not mad at all, obviously gratified. "Oh, he said, 'I only asked you out for a cup of coffee. I didn't ask you to marry me.' But that's not the point."

And she never did date a non-Jew, so far as they knew. In any case, soon after she entered college, her romantic life became a mystery to them, off limits as a subject. She did, it is true, bring home a number of gentile boys, but this was "purely platonic," as she put it—"We're just friends." She knew them in connection with her activities to end the persecution of Christians throughout the world. "A Christian Holocaust is going on as we speak," she declared at dinner in the presence of one of these guests, "and as a Jew who could have been turned into a lampshade, I cannot in good conscience remain a silent bystander." She brought home a Chinese graduate student who described how he had been beaten and tortured because of his membership in an underground church. She brought home a Sudanese lab technician whose family members had been burned or sold into slavery for practicing their faith. As they narrated their stories at the table, she listened raptly, her eyes moist, her mouth slightly open, even though she had surely heard them before. "Any guy who wants her will have to show torture marks," Arlene said. "What for is she foolin' with the Christians?" Maurice complained to Norman. "Where you think Hitler got all his big ideas from about the Jews, tell me that. And the Pope, you should excuse me, His Holiness, where was he during the war—playing pinochle?" "They're trying to hijack the Holocaust," Norman wailed. "Christians are not—I repeat, not!—acceptable Holocaust material. This is where we draw the line."

They tried to wean her from this new fixation by offering her a partnership in their business—complete control of the Women's Holocaust portfolio: abortion, sexual harassment, female genital mutilation, rape, the whole gamut—but she wasn't buying. "The Christians are the new Jews," she said.

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National Journal

"To most American eyes, these look like poverty neighborhoods, but this is the snapshot view; in the video version

they are the first frames on the way to prosperity,

the first way-station on the Santa Ana and San Bernardino Freeways to middle-income American comfort."

—*The Almanac of American Politics* on California's 30th Congressional District in Los Angeles.

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"Christians have a right to a Holocaust too. Since when do Jews have a monopoly? That's the problem with Jews. They never share." So they broke down after all and offered to take on the Christian Holocaust as part of their business, however alien and distasteful it was to them—to have her create and head up, in fact, a new department devoted entirely to this area. "Forget it," she said. "You guys are too compromised and politicized for me. You'd sell out the victims for the first embassy dinner invitation."

THE last time any member of the family had seen her was a few days after she called to say that she would be entering the Carmelite convent near Auschwitz as a postulant, and because it was a contemplative, enclosed, "hermit" order, she would not be available much afterward for visitors. She insisted that though she would soon become a novice and then eventually take vows, she would always consider herself to be a Jewish nun. They should keep that in mind. They were not losing her. They should not despair. The family decided that Arlene would go alone to see her. She accepted the mission despite her frequently voiced resolve never to set foot in that "huge cemetery called Poland—it's no place for a live Jew; this back-to-the-shtetl nostalgia is obscene; these grand tours of the death camps are grotesque." The day after Nechama called, Arlene flew to Warsaw.

When Nechama had converted to Catholicism, she had told them that it was a necessary step toward the fulfillment of her "vocation" but they should know and understand that, like the first Christians, she remained also a Jew. "What you mean?" Maurice had demanded. "Are you with us or against us? Are you a goy or a Jew? You can't have it both ways. You can't have your kishke and eat it also!" Norman wanted to know if this was some kind of Jews-for-Jesus deal, but no, she said, it was in the best tradition of the early Church fathers. Norman then made the hopeful point to the family that nowadays maybe you could be both a Christian and a Jew, just as you could, as everyone knew, be both a Buddhist and a Jew—"a Jew-Bude" it was called, something pareve, nothing to get excited about, neither milk nor meat.

Even so, her conversion was a devastating blow, though not entirely unexpected, given her increasing immersion in the Christian Holocaust. After college she had worked full time for the cause at its Washington headquarters, and then had set out on what she called her "pilgrimage," her "crusade," to bear witness to the persecution firsthand at the actual sites throughout the world, and to offer comfort and strength to the oppressed. She had been kicked out of Pakistan for agitation and promoting disorder. In Ethiopia she had been arrested, and major string-pulling had been required to spring her, which, fortunately, her family was able to manage discreetly, thanks to its position in the world and its fancy connections in high places ("A little schmear here, a little kvetch there," as Maurice recounted with satisfaction). As it became clearer and clearer to them that she was heading toward conversion, Norman had tried to make the case to her that she was far more useful to the Christian Holocaust as a Jew, that her Jewishness was an extremely effective media hook. It piqued people's curiosity—what was a nice Jewish girl like her doing in a place like this? It made her far more interesting and, let's face it, bizarre, especially as she was so Jewishly identified, with her family so prominent in Holocaust circles, bringing even greater attention and visibility to the cause. "Besides," Norman added deliberately, "you don't have to be Christian to love the Christian Holocaust. When I do the Whale Holocaust, do I become a whale? Think about it, Nechama'le. Think again, baby."

From contacts in Poland they knew almost immediately when Nechama had arrived there. She began a slow circuit of the main extermination camps, stopping for a few days at each one to fast and pray—first Treblinka, then Chelmno, Sobibór, Majdanek, Belzec, until she came, finally, to Auschwitz-Birkenau. She called home to say that she had lit a memorial candle in front of the Carmelite convent for a "blessed Jewish nun," Saint Edith Stein("Sister Teresa Benedicta of the Cross," Nechama called her), who was martyred in the gas chambers there. "Oy vey," Maurice had said. "She's talkin' about that convert Edit' Shtein? I'm not feelin' so good!" In another telephone conversation she had made the comment that traditional Judaism provides no real outlet for a woman's spirituality. "I mean, suppose a Jewish woman wants to dedicate her whole heart and soul and all of her strength to loving God and to prayer. Where is there a Jewish convent for that? Does Judaism even acknowledge the existence of a woman's spirituality in any context other than home and family?" She took a room in

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THE GUEST

When Chiqui asked me if my sleep in her house
had been good, I told the truth with a sweep
of my hands: *The mattress sags*, I said, and left
for Spanish class.

She dragged the mattress
off its frame and propped it in the narrow hall.
She pulled the larger, slightly newer mattress off
her and her husband's bed and hauled it
back to mine.

Now when Chiqui asks me
how I've slept, I lie: *Just fine*, I say,
though by this time I've learned
the Spanish word for shame.

—JUDITH McCUNE

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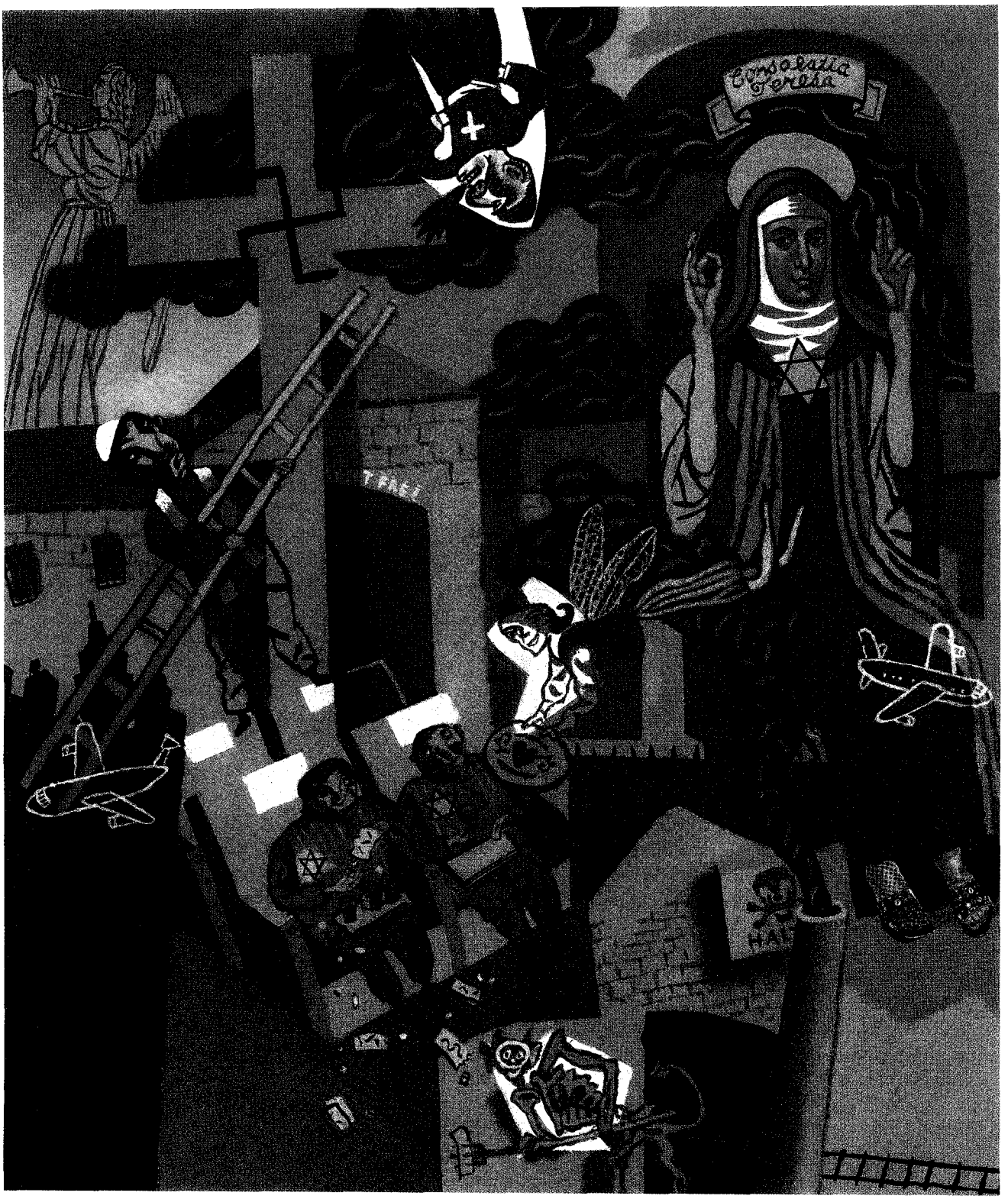

Oświęcim to be near the nuns. "They're such holy, holy women, it's humbling and uplifting, both at once. How could anyone ever accuse them of trying to Christianize Auschwitz? It's just ridiculous. Everything they do they do out of love."

Nechama arranged to have Arlene meet her at the large cross near the now-abandoned old convent, the building in which, during the Holocaust, the canisters of Zyklon B gas with which the Jews were asphyxiated had been stored, just at the edge of the death camp. She was already there, praying on her knees, when Arlene's car drove up. Arlene asked the driver to wait for her; she had no intention whatsoever of visiting the camp. After she finished with Nechama, she would go directly back to Kraków. She would be in Warsaw by evening. She would be on a plane flying out of this cursed country the

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next morning. As she approached the cross with her daughter kneeling before it, she could see two nuns in full habit posted in the distance. Nechama herself was wearing an unfamiliar sort of rough garment—probably some sort of nun's training outfit, Arlene thought.

Nechama heard Arlene approaching, and with her back still turned she signaled with her thumb and index finger rounded into a circle—a gesture she had picked up during a teen trip to Israel—for her mother to wait a few seconds more as she finished her devotions. Then, after placing her lips directly on the wood of the cross and kissing it passionately, she rose to her feet. "Mommy," she cried, and she ran to embrace her mother. Arlene shocked herself by breaking down in racking sobs that swept over her like a flash storm. Her mascara streaked down her cheeks.

"I'm sorry, I'm sorry," she kept on repeating.

"What are you sorry about? Go on, cry. Crying is good for you—it cleanses the spirit. There's nothing to be ashamed of."

"I'm sorry for letting them screw you up," Arlene sputtered into the coarse cloth of Nechama's garment. She had not planned to begin this way, but she could not stop herself now. "I'm sorry for not fighting harder to keep them from poisoning you with their Holocaust craziness. I should have fought them like a lioness protecting her cub. They crippled you, crippled you, they destroyed any chance you might have had to lead a normal life—and I did nothing to prevent it."

"Mom?" Nechama pushed Arlene to arm's length. "Two things, Mom. Number one, I'm not screwed up, and number two, the Holocaust, believe it or not, is the best thing that has ever happened to me. It has made me what I am today. I'm proud of what I am. I'm doing vital, redemptive work. I'm bringing healing to the world. Do you understand? I don't want you to pathologize me—okay, Mom? I'm not a sicko."

Wiping her eyes with a tissue that she held clutched in her fist, Arlene now took the time to look closely at her daughter. Nechama's face, framed by a kerchief that concealed all of her thick, curly hair, her best feature, was exposed and clear—no makeup, and no sign either of the acne that had distressed her well into her twenties. So convents are good for the complexion, Arlene concluded bitterly. Instead of contact lenses she was wearing glasses with translucent pale-pink plastic frames. The expression in her eyes was serene and benevolent—too placid, Arlene thought; she looked drugged, brainwashed, dead to life. A faint moustache lay over her top lip; in her new life of poverty, chastity, and obedience, in her tight schedule between Lauds and Compline, there was no place for the facial bleaching that Arlene had taught her as part of the beauty regimen of every dark-haired woman. Around her neck was a daunting cross made from some base metal. The womanly fullness of her barren hips bore down earthward against her skirts, pulled down inevitably by gravity whether they fulfilled their biological function or not, Arlene could see. She had put on a little weight—not that it mattered anymore. At least she was getting enough to eat.

Nechama quickly sensed her mother's appraising eye, and for a moment she was seized by a familiar irritation that she recognized from those times in the past when her mother had rated her appearance down to the last fraction of an ounce and had registered mute disappointment. By an act of will Nechama shook off this feeling, which she considered unworthy and a vanity.

"You look nice," Arlene finally said. She avoided Nechama's eyes, gazing up instead at the twenty-six-foot wooden cross looming behind them. "So this is the famous cross that the Jews and the Poles are beating up on each other about."

"Yes—isn't it silly?" Nechama said. "I guess I'll just never understand what Jews have against a cross."

The Crusades. The Inquisition. Pogroms. Blood libels. The Holocaust. If she can't figure out what we have against the cross, Arlene thought, especially when it is planted right in this spot, where a million Jews were gassed and burned, then she has strayed a long, long way from home. She has gone very far indeed. She is lost to us.

"I mean," Nechama went on, "what everyone has to realize now, if we're ever going to get beyond this, is that each Jew who was murdered in the Holocaust is another Christ crucified on the cross. When I pray to Him, I pray to each one of them. I pray every day to each of the six million Christs."

Suffering and salvation. Martyrdom and redemption. This was not a language that Arlene recognized. The cross cast its long dark shadow over them and onto the blood-soaked ground beyond. The afternoon was passing. Arlene adjusted the strap of the stylish black-leather bag on her shoulder and glanced toward the waiting car. More than anything else in the world now, she wanted to get away from here, from this madness that bred more madness, from this alien sacred imagery that justified unspeakable atrocities. She wanted ordinariness, dailiness, routine—plans, schedules, menus, lists, programs, things, material goods. "Do you need anything, Nechama?" Arlene asked. "I mean, before I go—like underwear, vitamins, toiletries? Tell me what you need, and I'll see that you get it."

"Oh, I don't need anything anymore. I'm finished with needing things," Nechama said, breaking her mother's heart. "We live very simply here. Other people have needs. They send us long lists of what they need, and we pray for them. That's what we do. I can pray for you, too, Mommy. Tell me what you need."

What did she need? She needed to think and see clearly. She needed to remember everything she had forgotten—or she would soon lose faith that she had ever existed at all. "I need to have you back with me," Arlene said quietly, in the voice she would use when she lay down in bed beside her daughter at night, to ease the child into sleep.

Nechama smiled rapturously. "We'll pray for you," she said, and her glance moved from her mother and the cross above them to encompass her whole world, the two nuns motionless in the distance, and the million dead inside the camp who never rested.

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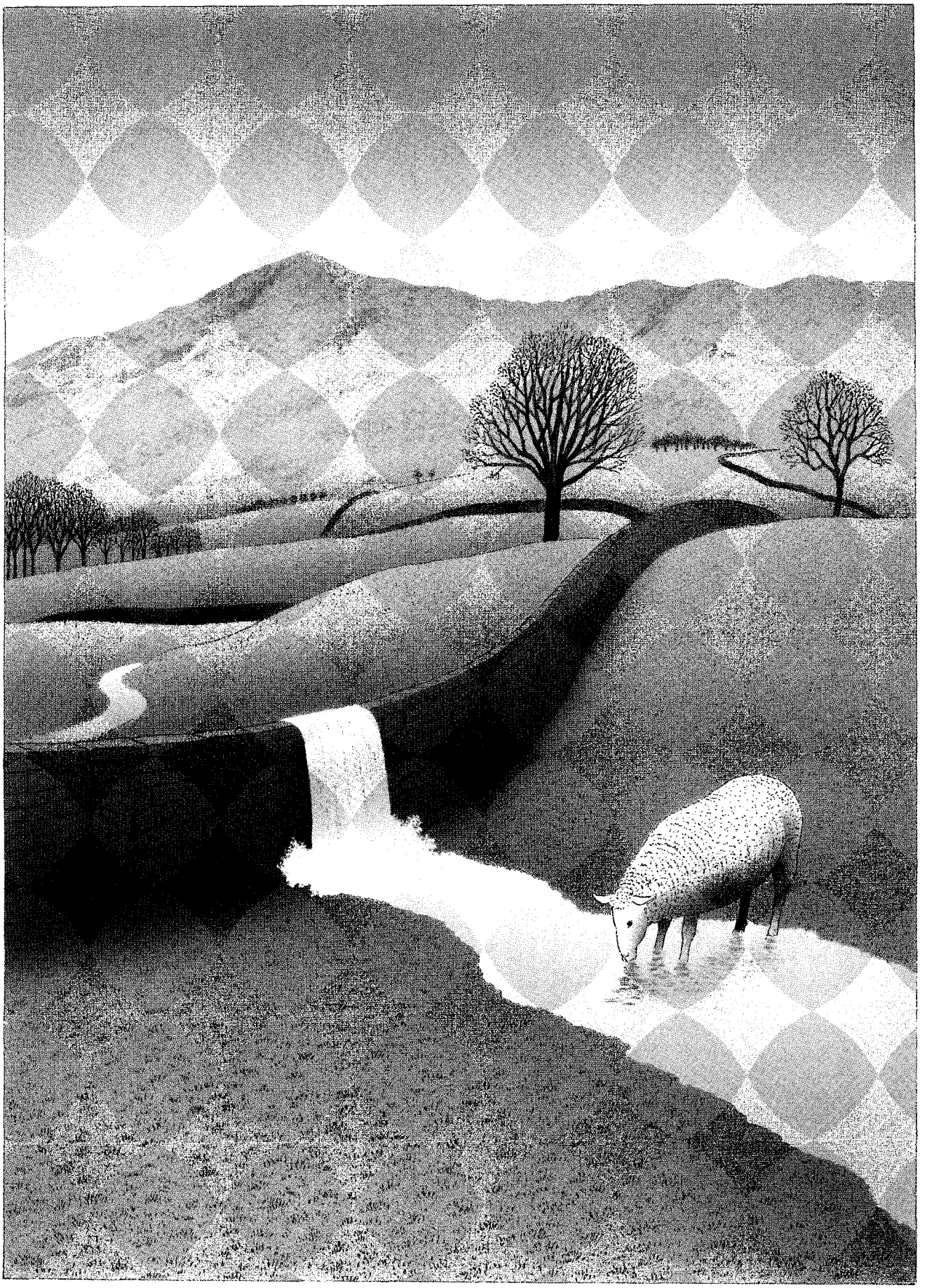
SPRING *by Guy Billout*



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ARCHIVE PHOTOS

Resurrecting Fats

New transcriptions of Fats Waller's pipe-organ and piano solos could ensure that Waller is remembered not just as an entertainer but as a great composer

by Stephen Budiansky

FATS Waller's rise to lasting fame as an entertaining singer with a witty twist on the popular songs of his day was still several years off when, in November of 1926, the Victor Talking Machine Company invited Waller to a recording session at its Camden, New Jersey, studio. Victor, like other record companies, had only recently made the remarkable discovery that "hillbilly" and "race" music could be big business, and Waller was one of many Harlem musicians whom Victor was eager to record.

Waller was then twenty-two years old, and already well known in Harlem as a pianist on the party and nightclub circuit, but he had made only a few recordings, mainly accompanying blues singers or playing in pickup ensembles. The Camden studio was a deconsecrated church that Victor had bought for its admirable acoustics, and with the building came a church organ, which the recording company overhauled and expanded with many new ranks of pipes. The plan for the November session was that Waller would accompany a black vocal group singing the spiritual "All God's Chillun Got Wings." But to warm up Waller rattled off two tunes on the 2,000-pipe instrument: W. C. Handy's "St. Louis Blues" and a piece of his own, "Lenox Avenue Blues," also known as "The Church Organ Blues." The Victor engineers recorded those performances, and company executives were sufficiently impressed that over the next three years they brought Waller back for a half dozen more sessions, recording two dozen other pipe-organ solos.

None of the resulting records sold particularly well, however, and as Waller's fame as a singer and an entertainer grew in the 1930s, and Victor pressed him to crank out far more commercially appealing jazz-band treatments of hundreds of Tin Pan Alley standards, these earlier solos faded into obscurity.

Waller's vocal performances of "Ain't Misbehavin'," "The Joint Is Jumpin'," "Your Feet's Too Big," and dozens of other songs have never gone out of print, but his organ solos were unavailable for decades; they resurfaced only in 1964—on a British LP—and even then were known primarily to aficionados. The Camden performances became more widely available in the 1970s, as French RCA began releasing a complete set of Waller's recordings on thirty-six LPs, and most of the organ solos are now out on a 1998 Jazz Archives CD (*Fats Waller Vol. 3: Young Fats at the Organ*, EPM 159262) as well. It is safe to say, however, that they hardly rank among his most popular recordings.

THAT is a shame, because they are brilliant proof of a side to Waller's musical genius that has often been ignored, or even denigrated, in the years since his untimely death from pneumonia, in 1943. If nothing else, Waller's organ performances are technical tours de force that reveal an almost wizardly mastery of what is surely the most ungainly instrument ever pressed into the service

Waller at the organ at Carnegie Hall, 1942. He recorded two dozen pipe-organ solos early in his career, but these were soon forgotten, eclipsed by his celebrity as a singer and an entertainer

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of jazz. It would be hard to invent a musical instrument less well suited to jazz performance than the pipe organ. The rhythmic emphasis to which the piano lends itself so naturally is not even part of the organ's musical vocabulary. Stroke a key, bang a key—it's all the same to the organ. The instrument's sound-generating mechanism has two modes, on or off, wind flowing through the pipe or wind stopped, and there is simply no way to swing a beat by making one note of a measure louder than any other. Adding to this difficulty is the fact that even with modern organs, which use pneumatic or electrical (as opposed to purely mechanical) linkages to connect the keyboard with the valves that admit air into the pipes, the player experiences a tiny delay between the depression of a key and the emergence of a sound. Any hall big enough to hold a pipe organ has a natural reverberation of as much as several seconds, which adds to this disorienting sensation. It's hard enough to play Bach when your fingers are doing one thing and your ears are telling you another; trying to play a swing rhythm under such conditions must be like juggling on a unicycle while watching your reflection in a fun-house mirror.

Somehow Waller did make the pipe organ swing. (There is a great moment during his recording of "Sugar" on the Camden organ, accompanying the blues singer Alberta Hunter, when she chimes in during his solo, "Plonk that thing, Fats!") Waller's organ technique was almost entirely self-taught, acquired by hanging around the musicians at Harlem's Lincoln Theater and ultimately wangling his way into filling in when the regular organist took a break. By age seventeen Waller was giving Bill "Count" Basie lessons on the Lincoln Theater organ. He was also doing things that classically trained organists would say are almost impossible to pull off artistically: playing staccato, playing slurs and slides, playing clustered chords and arpeggios. All these effects require split-second judgment and an incredible sensitivity to tone and touch.

But the pieces are more than vehicles for Waller's technical flash; they are compositional gems, flights of melodic and harmonic invention that reflect Waller's musical genius in its purest and most concentrated form. Many of the tunes, of his own composition and not, are fairly standard Tin Pan Alley formulas, but Waller subjected them to a theme-and-variations treatment that milked their possibilities to the utmost. He could take an ordinary folk tune like "Careless Love" (it appears as "Loveless Love" on Waller's recording) or a standard like "I Ain't Got Nobody" and dissect it in a series of improvisational inventions that are themselves the strongest answer to the criticism—still sometimes heard from jazz historians who focus on Waller's later success and superficially buffoonish stage persona—that Waller was formulaic and "commercial," not a true artist.

Such improvisational performances have not generally been thought of as "compositions"; jazz in the 1920s and 1930s was still evolving from a largely unwritten tradition, and the very spontaneity of performances would seem to argue against the idea of composition at all. But part of the tradition, especially for keyboard players, involved learning the performances of the masters, if for no other reason than to be able to "cut" them at the sort of free-for-all competitions that took place on the Harlem party circuit. Waller himself learned to play a number of pieces by the master of the "stride" piano style, James P. Johnson, by slowing down player-piano rolls that Johnson had made and placing his fingers over the keys as they dropped down. Although each stride pianist had his own style, and might never play the same piece exactly the same way twice, a few particularly well-known numbers became standards. Every stride pianist learned, for example, Johnson's classic rendition of "Carolina Shout"—if only to out-Johnson Johnson at it.

The obvious care with which Waller worked out his organ pieces offers another good argument for treating them as genuine compositions. And a volume of seventeen transcriptions of Waller's organ, piano, and vocal performances, to be published later this year as part of the American Musicological Society's Music of the United States of America (MUSA) series, may go a long way toward establishing Waller as an important, even great, American composer. His organ works in particular have a balance, structure, and movement that can seem almost classical, with series of increasingly embellished variations, often in very different styles and forms, welded together into beautiful, coherent wholes

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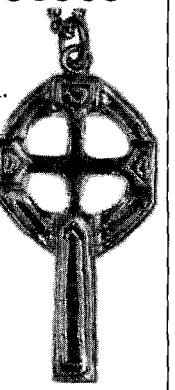

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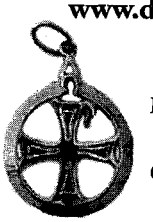

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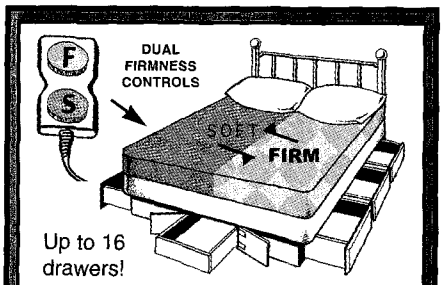

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by their carefully laid-out harmonic underpinnings and interlocking melodic themes. Call-and-response passages, witty countermelodies, and Waller's rich exploitation of the many different voices of the organ to orchestrate different passages all suggest a meticulously planned performance that nevertheless retains its improvisational quality. With the publication of the MUSA volume, called *Fats Waller: Performances in Transcription*, several of Waller's organ works will be available for the first time in a definitive written form for study—and they may even become part of the classical organ repertoire, just as Scott Joplin's piano rags are now an established part of the classical piano repertoire.

THE problematic difference between Joplin and Waller is that Joplin (like other ragtime composers) really did compose: he sat down at the piano, wrote out the notes, and published his pieces as sheet music. Although Waller's style of stride-piano playing was a direct descendant of ragtime, Waller rarely wrote out his pieces in full; not until the mid-1930s did he even write down so much as a skeleton of the parts for both hands. In general, he would write only a simple melody line and the most fragmentary additional notations of the overall dimensions of the piece. (All that was required to copyright an original tune was a melody and a title.) Waller did record some rolls for player piano, but these are considered unreliable sources, because rolls were often modified after they had been recorded, by having extra holes punched in them. A few of Waller's more popular piano pieces were published as sheet music during his lifetime—but, says Paul Machlin, the author of the MUSA volume, these are "deeply simplified" versions cranked out by "some Tin Pan Alley hack" who listened to Waller's playing and came up with at best a rough approximation. The recordings of Waller's performances are thus the only authentic source for producing a written score.

Transcribing these musical sounds onto paper decades after they were recorded was a surprisingly difficult and exacting task. Machlin was motivated to try it, he says, in part because he was frustrated at how often Waller's work has been misunderstood by critics and historians who simply do not appreciate his formidable keyboard technique and his inventive genius. "You only really understand that when you write it down and look at it," Machlin says.

Machlin, a pianist and a graduate of Yale and the University of California at Berkeley, is a professor of music at Colby College, in Maine. He wrote his Ph.D. thesis on Richard Wagner's opera *The Flying Dutchman*. He became interested in Fats Waller in 1976, when he offered to teach a course at Colby on American music to mark the Bicentennial. That led to a course on jazz, and then to a year off, in 1980, when he began some serious research on Waller. His book *Stride: The Music of Fats Waller* was published in 1985. (When Machlin shifted his research from Wagner to Waller, a librarian friend remarked, "I couldn't help noticing you haven't moved out of the WAs yet.")

Like many pianists, Machlin realized that Waller's keyboard works were something exceptional. He was dismayed by critics who said that Waller had "wasted his talent" or wasn't serious about his music. "There's a particular kind of white jazz historian who sees jazz as an expression of oppressed people," Machlin says. "And so when they see a commercially successful African-American, it somehow 'lessens the authenticity.'" Waller managed to get very rich. But Machlin insists that in Waller's case originality and authenticity were not at all incompatible with commercial success; even when Waller recorded "trivial" tunes, he managed to mark them with his genius, and his onstage antics were often a sophisticated and subtly sarcastic commentary. Waller had a way of mocking the saccharine lyrics of the popular songs that Victor wanted him to record ("I'm crazy 'bout my baby" became "I'm exasperated about my offspring" in one take) while turning even the most fatuous tunes into raw material for his "endlessly inventive melodic imagination," in Machlin's words.

The rhythmic, harmonic, and melodic complexity of the stride style is part of the challenge in reducing these performances to paper. In both ragtime and stride the left hand alternates low bass notes with chords near the middle of the keyboard. But in stride the bass figures are usually harmonically rich tenths rather than simple octaves, and the chords are often bluesy seventh chords with flatted notes and clusters of four or five notes in place of simple three-note

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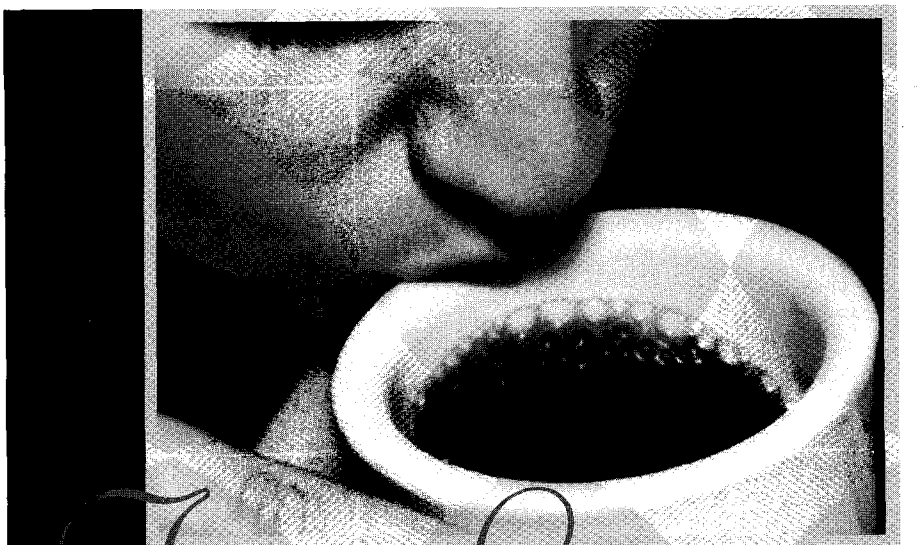
chords. The left hand swings before or after the beat in a much freer rhythmic variation than the steady "oompah" syncopation of ragtime.

The real hallmark of stride is the dazzling improvisational embellishments by the right hand, known in the business as "tricks"—fast-moving flourishes that break up or ornament the melody line. Waller's organ pieces adapt the stride style to the organ by using the pedal board—a separate bass keyboard played with the feet, which sounds its own set of low-pitched pipes—to accomplish the back-and-forth bass-note leaps, freeing up the left hand to do some fancier rhythmic and harmonic work. Waller fully exploited other unique capabilities of the organ in adapting his pieces to the instrument. On the organ, a note sounds for as long as the key is held down; that creates the possibility of introducing countermelodies against a sustained legato line, an effect Waller put to good use on several occasions.

Computer programs exist that can automatically transcribe musical sound into musical notation, but Machlin found they were of little use with Waller's music, mainly because they are not sophisticated enough to capture his rhythmic subtleties. So Machlin works the old-fashioned way. First he listens to a song until he has a basic picture firmly in his mind of its harmonic shape and of what the hands are doing in each phrase. Then he listens to one bar—or sometimes half a bar—at a time, writes down what he thinks he hears, and then tries it out on the keyboard to see if it sounds right. Then he goes back and fills in what he's missed. Sometimes he plays a tape at half speed to try to pick out what Waller was doing. Next comes an extensive process of editing and checking and seeking the opinions of others. "You have someone look over it and they question just about everything," he says. The low fidelity of many of the early recordings doesn't help. Because musical sounds contain natural overtones, it can be extremely difficult to tell whether all or only some of the notes of a chord were actually played. In a few passages, where "despite a lot of listening and agony" Machlin is still not absolutely sure, he has marked in brackets on the transcriptions what he *thinks* Waller was doing. It can take a full day's work to produce just a start-



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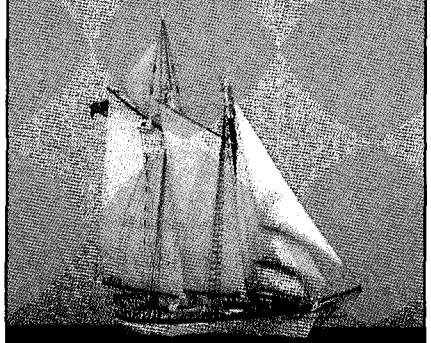

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ing draft of twenty-four bars; transcribing a first draft of one complete piece can take weeks.

THE MUSA series, which is being supported by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities and is being published by A-R Editions, is intended to highlight monuments in American music that have never been published in definitive form. It is first and foremost a scholarly project, and by its very nature its primary audience is likely to be musicologists and historians of music who wish to study the scores, rather than performers interested in playing them. Some volumes are devoted to a single piece, others to a series of pieces; they include never-before-published works along with works that have been available only in badly edited or inconsistent editions. Volumes published so far or in progress include the songs of Charles Ives, John Philip Sousa marches, Ruth Crawford's chamber music, American fiddle tunes, slave songs, George Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*, and Irving Berlin's early songs. The Fats Waller volume will include three organ performances ("I Ain't Got Nobody," "Rusty Pail," and "Waiting at the End of the Road") and several piano solos and popular songs ("Ain't Misbehavin'," "I'm Crazy 'Bout My Baby," "Honeysuckle Rose"), along with some small-ensemble performances.

Will any organists or pianists play these solo works once they are available in standard written notation? The pieces are full of vitality, originality, and interest, and on those grounds it may be hard to imagine why they should not find a home in the keyboard repertoire—again, much as Scott Joplin's rags have, and for much the same reason: the pieces are not only musically rich but often very witty.

"I Ain't Got Nobody" is one of the best illustrations of the Waller genius and wit in action: It begins with a slow, lush, theater-organ treatment of the verse, full of swelling chords and melodramatic retards, that is kept just on the near side of schmaltz by a subdued stride tempo coming steadily from the pedals. But, Machlin says, almost immediately we realize that Waller is having us on. By the time the chorus arrives, the left hand has started sneaking in with some off-beat syncopations, and a lilting little countermelody begins to mock the sentimentality of the lachrymose melody and lyrics. Then all pretense is dropped, the tempo picks up, and we're off on a bluesy flight of "tricks" and up-tempo stride figures, call-and-response choruses, and melodic variations.

One reason that organists and pianists may not find themselves tempted to tackle Waller's solo works, however, is that they are very hard; the immediate impact of Machlin's publication may be less to encourage their performance than to generate renewed reverence for Waller's skill. Like all great performers, Waller made it seem easy, though it is anything but. (Waller owed some of that skill to the fact that he had huge hands, which let him do things on the keyboard that few others could. The blind pianist George Shearing said that shaking hands with Waller was like "grabbing a bunch of bananas.") The pieces are not for the faint-hearted; they are certainly much more difficult than Joplin's—though, as Machlin says, "that is part of their charm."

The other question is *Should* anyone try to perform these works? The improvisational nature of Waller's style does make one wonder if imitating note-for-note what he did on one occasion is the equivalent of performing a written composition, or whether it runs the danger of winding up as something grotesque, like an Elvis impersonation. Machlin says he hopes that pianists and organists will play the pieces, but he admits that some funny questions do arise. Dan Morgenstern, the director of the Rutgers Institute of Jazz Studies, has observed that Waller must have played a piece like "Honeysuckle Rose" every working day of his life, and he never played it the same way twice. "The recording becomes a frozen performance," Machlin says, "a benchmark—willy-nilly, in spite of itself." But it's all we have to go on, and "whatever else you may speculate about, you *know* that that happened." Machlin also points out that Waller "certainly wanted to be taken seriously [as a composer] at the end of his life, *very* badly"; he began to put much more effort into reworking the new tunes and left-hand lines that he composed. "Some people say to me, 'Why should someone play these pieces when Fats Waller has already done it?'" Machlin says. "My answer is 'For the same reason you'd play a Chopin étude when Chopin has already done it.'"

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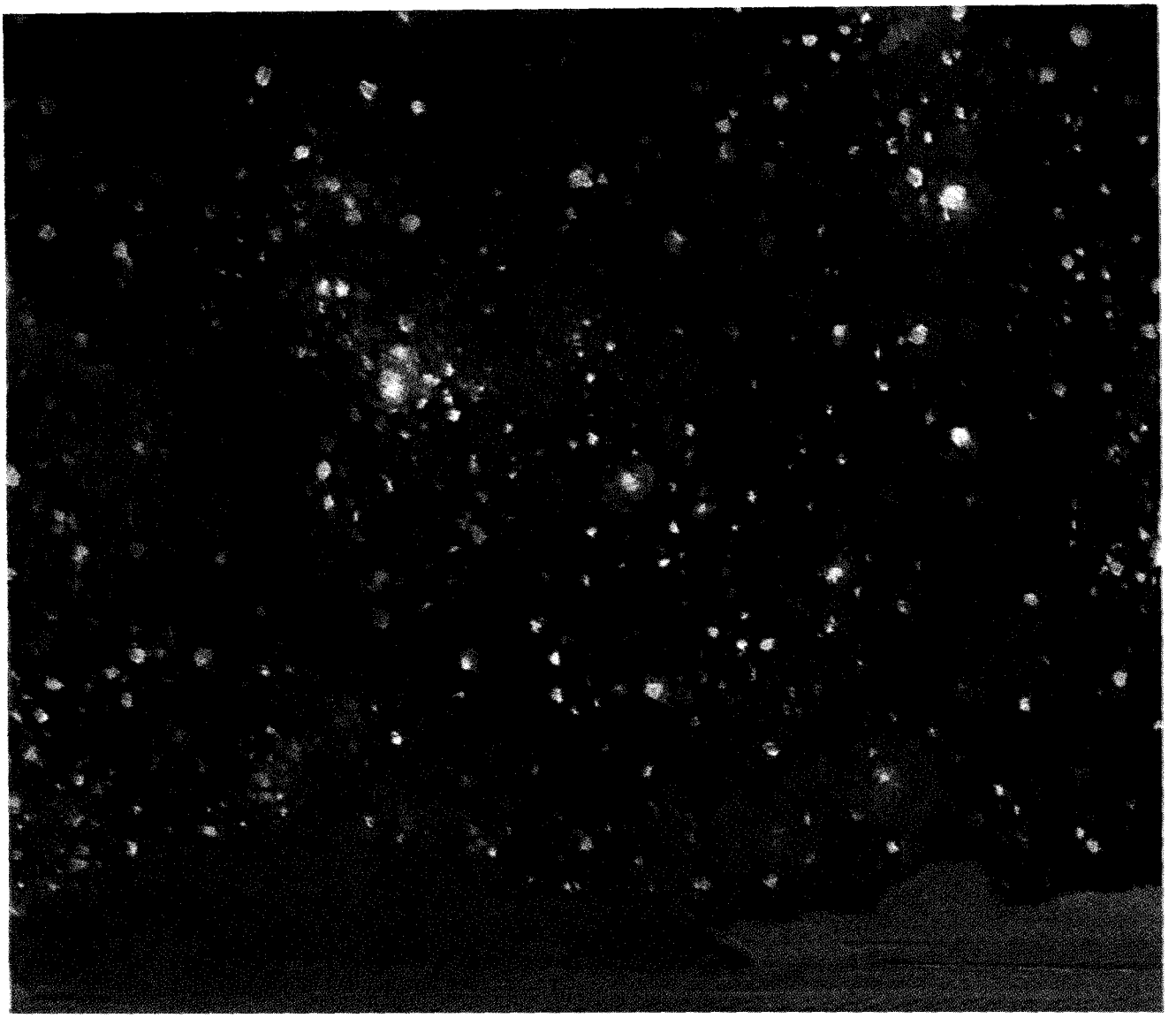

Extreme Stargazing

A race to spot 110 designated celestial objects in the time between dusk and dawn

by David H. Freedman

ASTRONOMY may be unique among the hard sciences in that some of its heroes are known primarily for looking, without necessarily making much sense of what they see. A case in point is Charles Messier, a tenacious eighteenth-century Frenchman who, armed with a telescope hardly better than what one could buy at Wal-Mart today, devoted most of his life to sweeping the heavens in search of comets. He discovered several, but he is celebrated for a different reason: in the process Messier recorded the precise locations of sundry faint, pretty smudges that we now know to be galaxies, star clusters, and nebulae, or clouds of gas and dust. His efforts were prematurely curtailed by injuries sustained in an icehouse mishap, but he still managed, with some assistance, to catalogue 110 celestial objects.

There is no way of knowing what Messier thought would become of his catalogue; it seems unlikely, though, that he imagined it inspiring an arduous competitive event. But it did: the Messier Marathon. In this, participants try to observe and identify all of Messier's 110 heavenly objects in a single night. Messier Marathons came into being in the United States in the mid-1970s and have grown in popularity ever since.

That it is possible to spot all the Messier objects in one night is owing to a

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quirk of celestial alignment of which Messier himself was probably unaware. On any given night a small wedge of sky doesn't make it into view between dusk and dawn. The particular wedge, and the Messier objects in it, vary over the course of the year, as the earth makes its way around the sun. But sometime from mid-March to early April it happens that the unseen patch contains no Messier objects—and so for several days the entire Messier catalogue rotates through the night sky. Light from the moon typically leaves only one or two of these nights fit for a marathon.

Though a marathon can be attempted alone in the back yard, most amateur astronomers who tackle one are drawn together, for much the same reasons that runners gather for terrestrial marathons: preferred venues, camaraderie, the spirit of competition, and witnesses. Astronomy clubs throughout the United States, and to a lesser extent in other northern-latitude countries (many Messier objects aren't visible from the Southern Hemisphere), hold marathons in which the goal is simply for people to have fun and to spot as many objects as they comfortably can before deciding to call it a night. The All Arizona Messier Marathon is one of a handful that do not fall into this laid-back category.

LAST year the Messier Marathon was held on March 13. (This year the prime marathon night will be April 1.) I arrived at the flat, scrubby site of the Arizona gathering, some ninety minutes outside Phoenix, at about five—an hour and a half before sunset, and almost two hours before the sky would be dark enough to see more than a few stars. The gathering already had the look of an elaborate tailgate party stretching for a hundred yards. About forty people were there, mostly huddled in groups of two or three to a telescope, each group supported at a minimum by chairs, tables, and car trunks crammed with supplies, and in many cases by tents, pop-up camper vans, or even RVs. People were poring over charts and books and the odd laptop computer, or fiddling with their telescopes, a few of which were—startlingly, considering the need for portability in Messier marathoning—the size of naval artillery pieces. Soon the gathering had grown to about seventy people, roughly half of whom intended to compete.

The competitors were an eclectic bunch, most of them from the Phoenix and Tucson areas, and included a number of first-time marathoners. Mike Luciano, a young mailman who would look at home on a skateboard, brought his fellow letter carrier and girlfriend, Debby Whiddon, her two children, and their Pomeranian. Luciano and Whiddon had laid in a supply of cola and pastry to help keep the kids awake past their bedtime, but a tent was standing by for the inevitable sugar-fueled crash. Robert Martin, a software engineer, was there with his fiancée, Kasia Zabinski, an actor who also makes science-fiction and other independent films. Her scarlet lipstick and leather jacket were conspicuously hip among the nearly ubiquitous astronomy-themed T-shirts and caps. Glenn Nishimoto, a buoyant public-health worker with an eye-catching aluminum-skinned telescope, told me that a weekend of practice had raised his hopes of going all the way.

There were several old hands, too, including Steve Bell, an electrical engineer with a 109 marathon (in which he'd missed just a single object) under his belt, and Gerry Rattley, an electronic chip designer and one of the nine people on the planet who have ever been credited with a perfect marathon. Only one competitor, Bill Ferris, actually had the word "astronomer" in his job title, and he hastened to point out that it was only a half-time position—though the miniature observatory built into his tent suggested that he would be a force to contend with.

Just after sunset A. J. Crayon, the deep-sky chairman of the Phoenix-area Saguaro Astronomy Club, who has organized the All Arizona Messier Marathon annually since 1993, gave an informal pep talk to the crowd. As they spotted objects, Crayon explained, contestants were to check them off on the official marathon sheet. The honor system would be in force. (Crayon later told me that what small amount of concern over cheating exists tends to focus on the possibility—so far unrealized—that a relative hacker will claim an object that more-experienced observers fail to spot.) The first-, second-, and third-place finishers, determined strictly according to the number of objects spotted, would each get a plaque; anyone who saw more than fifty objects would get a certificate.

Everyone returned to his or her scope. As the sky darkened, tension mounted, and for good reason: the Messier Marathon starts with a bang. The section of sky containing the Messier objects just barely fits between sunset and sunrise, so the most westerly object, M74—a mid-sized and not especially bright galaxy—was going to sink below the horizon before the sky was dark enough to guarantee its visibility. In other words, most competitors would probably have their hopes of a perfect score dashed just minutes into the eleven-hour event.

A dozen or so stars shortly became visible to the naked eye. Some observers tried to use these as reference points as they aimed their scopes at the still-blank patch of sky hiding M74. For a few minutes it was oddly silent, as competitors tried various tricks to make M74 jump into relief, from switching eyes on the scope to looking just to the side of M74's presumed location (so as to capitalize on the eye's more sensitive off-center vision) to jiggling the scope. After several more minutes they started swinging their scopes in search of other, easier-to-find objects. I later learned that only twelve competitors, including Crayon and Rattley, had spotted M74.

Soon hundreds of stars were shining, along with three planets. By eight-fifteen most competitors had settled into a steady routine. Under other circumstances they might have filled notebooks with descriptions and sketches of their sightings—and many of the Messier objects are quite beautiful, from galaxies that appear as opaline whorls or streaks to nebulae whose indigo or other tints can be picked up by large telescopes. But tonight's objects were quarry to be spotted quickly—"bagged" is the term marathoners use—and then immediately left behind.

Bagging an object is easier said than done. To see anywhere near 110 in a night a competitor must nail one about every six minutes. And because the objects aren't evenly spread through the sky, there are periods when it is necessary to spot an object every two or three minutes. Three minutes may sound like plenty of time in which to line up an object in a telescope—especially given charts that show the position of each object with respect to familiar constellations—but it's not. What can be seen through a telescope is only a tiny portion of the sky, much smaller than any recognizable segment of a constellation. Looking at the sky bit by bit through the eyepiece is a lit-

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tle like having to find your way around your house by looking at one square inch of carpeting or wallpaper at a time. Many amateurs own telescopes with computerized "go-to" systems these days, but almost everyone I met in Arizona had disconnected them. "It would be like fishing with a net," one competitor said. Instead most marathoners relied on the "star-hopping" method, which involves training the telescope on a star that can be found with the naked eye and then jumping in succession to other easily identifiable stars close by until one has the desired Messier object in view.

By ten o'clock the temperature had plummeted, and people were starting to add layers of clothing. The time appeared to be passing uneventfully for most of the competitors, who were steadily bagging and recording objects. But around eleven o'clock, with the rising of the constellation Virgo, the intensity increased. Whereas most major constellations contain perhaps five or so Messier objects, Virgo contains sixteen, along with dozens of other objects that are easy to mistake for Messiers. One marathoner showed me a telescopic view in which there were six distinct galaxies, only two of which were Messier objects.

In order to see anywhere near 110 celestial objects in a night a competitor must nail one about every six minutes.

Still, for the more experienced gazers Virgo is generally no problem. Gerry Rattley wrapped it up in less than five minutes. Don Jones, a mathematics professor whose telescope was thirty inches wide and twelve and a half feet long (he needed a ceiling-painter's ladder to reach the eyepiece, and kept clambering up and down to reconcile his telescopic views with the dense star charts spread on the tailgate of his car), also breezed through it—and then some. "I'm seeing galaxies that aren't in the book," he said—a hazard with an oversized scope.

In contrast, A. J. Crayon, the marathon's coordinator, was in something of a frenzy, muttering nonstop as he scurried between his charts and his telescope, stopping only to pound his flashlight, whose batteries were running down. "I got half of them," he explained of his hunt through Virgo, "and then I jumped to the wrong star, and then I was lost." Crayon was soon back on track, but some of the less serious competitors found this a good time to call it quits. I stopped by one RV in which a group of airline employees were holed up against the cold, enjoying hot chocolate and in some cases preparing for bed. I left them reluctantly.

The Virgo activity wound down shortly after midnight, with the arrival of a large patch of sky containing relatively few Messier objects. Many competitors took the opportunity to grab some sleep. This seemed to work for those who had campers, sleeping bags, or propane heaters, but I spent two hours shivering in my car (it's not good form to run one's engine in the middle of an observing site) before finally drifting off.

I was awakened around three by renewed sounds of distress from Crayon. "I'm in trouble," he said in a low voice. He was now sporting a one-piece insulated jumpsuit and a watch cap with a Batman logo; he had the earpieces of his eyeglasses outside the cap. Crayon's truck was blocking his view of two Messiers. There was nowhere else to put the truck, and if he moved his telescope he would have to recalibrate it, losing fifteen minutes or so. He decided to skip the blocked objects for now, hoping that they would pop into view later. A pack of coyotes to the north mocked his decision loudly and at length.

Other observers, too, were hitting snags. A few, out of some combination of overconfidence and fatigue induced poor judgment, had napped without setting an alarm, and woke to find themselves behind. Though Rattley had remained awake, he had taken a long break from Messier-hunting and now caught up with astonishing speed, working his scope like a fiddle and bagging object after object without so much as glancing at a chart. "M22, a nice globular," he mumbled, squinting through the eyepiece and then immediately yanking the telescope to a new position. "There's M21 . . . M20, the Trifid, some color, nice . . . M8, the Lagoon Nebula, nice . . . M24, part of the Milky Way cloud . . ."

A crescent moon came up just before five. Between the moon, the fluorescent haze of approaching sunrise, and a thin line of low red clouds, spotting Messiers was becoming increasingly difficult. Several people bleated in frustration.

The twelve competitors who had seen M74 at the start had all bagged every object up to this point. But Crayon—who had ended up moving and realigning his telescope—now lost three in the glare, and Rattley lost one. With a single object to go, five people still had a chance to join the elite list of perfect marathoners.

The final object, M30, wouldn't rise until well into twilight, only a short time ahead of the sun. It was expected to be even harder to see than M74 had been; some believed it would be outright impossible. Nonetheless, by five-thirty most people were pointing at the spot where M30 was supposed to be. No one shouted out in excitement, though, and by six the last telescope had been abandoned.

This ending felt anticlimactic to me, but everyone else seemed suddenly energized. Most people stood around gabbing, as if they had just awakened from a long, comfortable sleep and were pleasantly surprised to find themselves surrounded by fellow Messier enthusiasts. As Crayon collected the check-off sheets, he identified the winners, five in all, who'd gotten 109 objects. One was Bill Ferris, the half-time astronomer. Three besides him were highly experienced observers. The last was a relative newcomer, but he had teamed up with one of the other winners. Eighteen marathoners got a hundred or more objects—a group achievement that had been bettered only twice before, anywhere, both times at All Arizona marathons. Some first-timers had done exceptionally well: Glenn Nishimoto had bagged 106, and Robert Martin 105. Even Mike Luciano finished respectably—"somewhere around eighty," he told me—while Whiddon and the kids slept.

As I climbed into my car to leave, I was startled by the sun breaking over the horizon. I hadn't realized that it wasn't up yet, and it seemed to me at that moment to provide an absurd and entirely uncalled-for amount of light.

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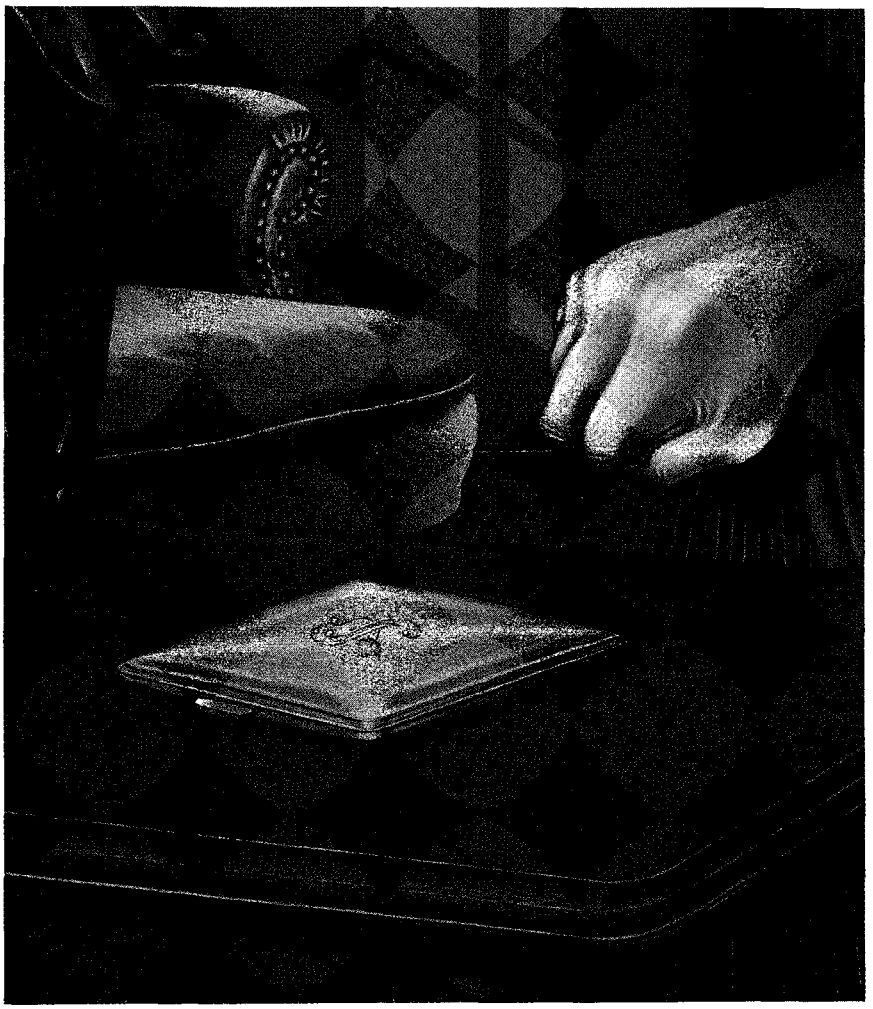
John O'Hara's Protectorate

His undisguised longing for acclaim still keeps John O'Hara from being the favorite son of the place he defined

by Benjamin and Christina Schwarz



So widespread is the literary world's scorn for John O'Hara that the inclusion two years ago of his *Appointment in Samarra* on the Modern Library's list of the 100 best novels of the twentieth century was used to ridicule the entire project. Although a number of writers—John Updike, Gay Talese, Tom Wolfe, Louis Begley, Geoffrey Wolff, James Dickey, Guy Davenport, Fran Lebowitz, and Shelby Foote among them—have admitted to admiring O'Hara, many writers and critics have long delighted in disdaining him and seem to resurrect this "middlebrow" author only for the sport of cutting him down again.

As a self-consciously "big-picture" social novelist, O'Hara has been an easy mark ever since minimalist fiction became the vogue, but his novels, though immensely popular (not to mention immense), were out of critical fashion even in their time, as O'Hara himself was all too aware. Today he is so passé that although he holds the record for number of short stories published in *The New Yorker*, the magazine's books editor confessed in 1993, when asked about an assault on O'Hara by Harold Brodkey in her pages, that she didn't know enough about O'Hara's work to comment.

Still, timing alone didn't make O'Hara the Rodney Dangerfield of American letters. In part his critics' response is personal, driven by an urge to take down a peg a man who masked his profound insecurity with aggressive vanity. O'Hara was desperate for praise, but sullied his chances for a sympathetic reading by chronically overinflating his achievements. For years he "hanker[ed] noisily," as Updike has written, after the Nobel Prize, an honor obviously beyond his reach. A comment he once made about himself (which his wife chose as his epitaph) encapsulates his strengths as a writer and also the way he consistently ensured that they would be undervalued: "Better than anyone else, he told the truth about his time. He was a professional. He wrote honestly and well." As Malcolm Cowley observed, all but the first phrase is "an accurate summation of his career," but the initial claim provokes such exasperation that critics might be forgiven for dismissing the whole.

It's hard not to cringe when reading accounts of O'Hara's efforts to buoy his ego. He hounded friends and acquaintances to put him up for clubs and had the seals of those that accepted him embossed on a gold cigarette case, which he casually left on his coffee table to impress visitors. Blackballed by the ultra-exclusive Racquet Club, he ordered playing cards with the club's insignia through a friend and used them for bridge games at home. A Bentley was too understated; he bought himself a Rolls-Royce. At this remove such displays seem pathetic; at

Illustrations by Doug Smock

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the time they must have appeared risible to many and contemptible to some.

Indeed, he allowed his failure to attend Yale—to him the ultimate club—to rankle so conspicuously that Ernest Hemingway, on receipt of a windfall, famously remarked that the money should be used to "start a bloody fund to send John O'Hara to Yale." "A mean little story, but it shows what my friends think of me," O'Hara commented bitterly, and very much in character. Years later he complained to Yale's alumni magazine about the school's refusal to grant him an honorary degree. When Kingman Brewster, Yale's president, was asked why he never gave O'Hara that degree, he replied, "Because he asked for it."

O'HARA was born in 1905 in Pottsville, Pennsylvania, the banking, trading, and professional hub of the richest hard-coal fields in the world. An extraordinarily prosperous small city (its population reached a high of 22,000 in 1920), Pottsville boasted two daily newspapers and a reputation among the prep-school and Ivy League set as a great party town during the Christmas holidays. Like other cities of its class—Canton, Ohio, and Green Bay, Wisconsin—it supported an NFL team; Pottsville's even won the league championship in 1925. But "the Region," as the city and its surrounding southeastern-Pennsylvania towns are locally known, was also the site of some of the most prolonged and violent labor struggles in American history, which set mine owners and operators, mostly Episcopalians and Presbyterians, against Irish Catholic miners (among them the violent secret society the Molly Maguires).

As the son of a prominent surgeon, O'Hara held a social position far above that of almost all other Irish Catholics. But in a world in which "'foreigner' meant anyone who wasn't Anglo-Saxon," as one longtime Pottsville resident told us when we recently visited the town, O'Hara could never quite attain the status of his friends, members of the WASP "anthracite aristocracy." This predestined immobility gave O'Hara an acute sensitivity to minute yet telling social distinctions. He was fascinated by the pattern of a necktie, the make of a car, the brand of Scotch, the choice of collar pin, the misuse of a pronoun, the club joined, the college attended, and how these define—in fact, determine—character. "To read him on a fashionable bar or the Gibbsville country club," Edmund Wilson wrote of O'Hara's fictionalized Pottsville, "is to be shown on the screen of a fluoroscope gradations of social prestige of which one had not before been aware."

O'Hara's fascination with these details led him to falter as a writer. The received wisdom is that he was a gifted short-story writer who squandered his talent on long novels. In 1949 he published *A Rage to Live*, a sprawling chronicle of the supreme family of Fort Penn, the simulacrum of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. This was O'Hara's first best seller and the fastest-selling Random House title up to that time, and it put O'Hara on what is regarded as the wrong track. The *New Yorker* writer Brendan Gill, reflecting the critical consensus, panned the novel, objecting to its sexual explicitness (criticism that now seems prim) and judging it "a catastrophe." O'Hara, never judicious in his response to slights either real or perceived (although it is true that *The New Yorker* ill-used him astonishingly), refused for eleven years to write for the only magazine he deemed worthy of his stories. Throughout the 1950s he gave up the short story, sacrificing what came easily to him for the very genre that, in the eyes of his critics, had brought about his artistic downfall. Nevertheless, *A Rage to Live* and his subsequent novels followed the form that best suited O'Hara's ambitions and interests, if not his gifts.

TODAY'S reader can still appreciate the taut *Appointment in Samarra* (1934), even if he or she is puzzled by the enormous significance O'Hara placed on the differences between drivers of the comparably priced Buick and Franklin. But a reader accustomed to minimalist fiction is at a loss with *A Rage to Live* and the later novels, with their relentless accumulations of social minutiae—what prep schools served for lunch, how weddings and funerals were orchestrated, how real-estate deals were made, the social implications of a new hotel—all set, as O'Hara bragged, in "great blocks of type."

In writing what could be called his sociological novels—a form by then at least thirty years out of date—O'Hara was obviously influenced by Theodore Dreiser, Sinclair Lewis, and Booth Tarkington. But his greatest influence by far (and one that eluded all his contemporary critics)

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was the French novelist Jules Romains, the author of *Men of Good Will*, a twenty-seven-volume novel of Parisian life from 1908 to 1933. Before the publication of *A Rage to Live*, O'Hara wrote, "If I thought I had the time I would go on writing about Fort Penn as Romains did about Paris."

In a way he did. The works O'Hara set in what he called "my Pennsylvania Protectorate"—his fifty-three Gibbsville stories and eight of his novels—create, with their common settings and their interconnected families and characters, a thorough portrait of southeastern Pennsylvania, and specifically of the area's ruling class, from the 1880s to the Second World War. Although O'Hara left the Region when he was twenty-two and never lived there again, to read these novels is to enter an entire world. They work on the reader with an unspectacular but cumulative power.

Alfred Kazin wrote in one of his harsh assessments of the author that O'Hara's novels portray the "American Establishment." This was a view shared by many critics, but it is a mistaken notion, and the mistake itself is illuminating. What we now think of as the establishment—the web of national and multinational corporations and banks and the law firms that serve them, the great research universities, the national media, and the high federal bureaucracy—was just emerging in the period, 1880 to the 1930s, in which the main action of most of the novels takes place. And, of course, it bypassed the small cities of southeastern Pennsylvania entirely.

The world O'Hara summoned is extraordinarily foreign to modern readers. A few families control the economic, political, social, and cultural life of their localities. Their sons may attend nearby prep schools and colleges, or they may go off to, say, Lawrenceville and Princeton, but most return to run the real-estate concerns, banks, law firms, factories, and mills that are at the center of the economy and from which their families derive power and prestige. (Even time in this era was locally determined; a crazy-quilt pattern of miniature time zones was changed to a uniform system only when the budding national market required it.)

The true subject of O'Hara's chronicle is this provincial ruling class while it was being gradually supplanted by the "national class," as the historian Robert Wiebe has more precisely called the establishment. By the 1930s the local elite had lost so much ground that in *Appointment in Samarra* the aptly named Julian English's rash compulsion to put the Irish arriviste Harry Reilly in his place leads to English's demise rather than reinforcing his position in society. And significantly, in O'Hara's later novels provincial nabobs fail pathetically when they seek to make their mark in the emerging world of national politics and business.

POTTSVILLE'S economy today, with its prominent prison and several nursing and retirement homes, is emblematic of this shift in power. Old class antagonisms have mostly dissipated, according to Mimi O'Hara, John O'Hara's niece, who still lives in Pottsville. But so has the vitality of the city, as O'Hara anticipated. In "The Man on the Tractor," a Gibbsville story unusual in being set in the early sixties, long after the period that normally commanded O'Hara's attention, one of his characters comments to another:

> There's no money here, George. Not the way we knew it. . . . A few of our old friends have made some money in the stock market, but that's not here. That's New York and Philadelphia, and representing industries as far away as California.

Not slummy but certainly seedy, Pottsville is old without being "preserved." Although local boosters express hopes of transforming the city into a charming mecca for antiques hounds, this is almost impossible to imagine. The city that once burgeoned with four furriers, five department stores, seven jewelry shops, nine shoe stores, eleven furniture stores, thirty-seven clothing shops, three movie palaces, twenty lunchrooms and restaurants, and nine hotels (and also a red-light district that drew high rollers from New York and Philadelphia) is now neither thriving nor quite dead. Many of the storefronts are empty, and the agencies and enterprises housed by the others—an office-supply store, a center for maternal and family health services, a rape crisis center, a temp agency, a luncheonette—are hardly the sort to attract the strollers who used to crowd Pottsville on Friday and Saturday nights. A sign in the window of the Army recruitment center announces that it has moved to the mall. "People even buy their Halloween candy in Reading," one resident, who remembers Pottsville's heyday, says. After a stint as the Moose Lodge, one downtown nineteenth-century mansion is now derelict, and another, Cloud Home, a little farther up the mountain, is a home for "at risk" boys. Pottsville's grand Necho Allen Hotel (O'Hara's John Gibb Hotel) houses a senior citizens' residence. "'Gibbsville' doesn't exist anymore," Paul Connors, an O'Hara family friend who has lived in Pottsville most of his life, told us.

O'Hara's habit of dissecting Gibbsville gives the impression that the place is fairly extensive, even when he states outright that it is not. His description of the downward trajectory of the protagonists in the story "Imagine Kissing Pete," for instance, shows how a small place can seem large.

> They continued to live in Gibbsville, but in parts of the town that were out of the way for their old friends. There is no town so small that that cannot happen, and Gibbsville, a third-class city, was large enough to have all the grades of poverty and wealth and the many half grades in between in which $10 a month in the husband's income could make a difference in the kind and location of the house in which he lived.

Pottsville, surrounded by fog-trapping mountains and pinched by a jumble of hills, is compressed by its geography. Wooden row houses, packed tightly against one another, march up two slopes that rise from the declivity that is Centre Street (what O'Hara calls Main Street). The commercial district along that thoroughfare is only about six blocks long. Gibbsville's tony Lantenengo Street, on which townhouses give way to mansions, seems to extend for miles—something like Lake Drive in Milwaukee, Summit Avenue in St. Paul, or Euclid Avenue in Cleveland. But the grand stretch of Pottsville's Mahantongo Street covers only about a dozen blocks. The back yards of Mahantongo houses meet the back yards of the houses on middle-class Norwegian Street (O'Hara's Christiana Street), and the working-class neighborhood is no more distant than the next block down the hill.

Physically, Pottsville has changed little from the Gibbsville that O'Hara chronicled. The 1921 Colonial Revival Schuylkill Country Club is still surrounded by farmland, just as O'Hara's Lantenengo Country Club was. The house at 10 North

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George, one of two grand old houses standing side by side in what was an upper-crust neighborhood, was the model for 10 North Frederick, in the Gibbsville novel of the same name. "O'Hara took all the dirty laundry [of Pottsville's people], barely changed names and addresses, and wrote about them," Bill O'Reilly, whose uncle was the model for Harry Reilly, told us. "People didn't like him." (O'Hara, seeming both proud and defensive, reported similar reactions in a story: by writing that "tripe," a character declares, Dr. Malloy's son—O'Hara's fictionalized self—"gave the town a black eye.") Although some Pottsvillians continue the old game of trying to match real people with O'Hara's characters, almost all those he offended are dead, so no one really cares much, and the loss of those grudges seems sad. Those who knew O'Hara remember him as a truculent young man with a chip on his shoulder. "John had a prickly personality," Paul Connors says. And they judge his work objectively, agreeing with the critical consensus that, as James Kevlin, the editor of *The Pottsville Republican & Evening Herald*, says, he was "an astute reporter" but a novelist of the second rank. For a community obsessed with its past—amateur local historians are thick on the ground here—Pottsville seems strangely uninterested in the writer who is to outsiders plainly the most famous figure the Region has produced. We were bemused to find Pottsvillians embracing General George Joulwan, a recent NATO commander, as their favorite son.

To be sure, O'Hara must have been hard to tolerate. As one of his biographers, Matthew Bruccoli, has written, he "was regarded as a difficult drinker at a time when inebriety was a national pastime." His first love, Margaretta Archbald, from one of Pottsville's leading families, refused to marry him because he was a mean drunk and inclined to brawl. Eventually, however, fear for his health and dedication to his craft drove O'Hara to give up alcohol. Drinking, he declared, hampered his writing of the long novels that had become his ambition. O'Hara's perpetual sense of exclusion may have made him an obnoxious show-off, but it also allowed him to understand things that those secure in their societal groove often could not. As a young man, for instance, he wrote to his younger brother,

> Never forget that your girl or your wife is every damn bit as much a person as you are. . . . She thinks the world revolves around her just as you do around yourself, just as anyone does . . . and for you to attempt to dominate her, to pinch her personality, is some kind of sin.

"Rare advice," as Updike said, "for one man to be giving another in 1934."

Yet with the exception of *Appointment in Samarra*, O'Hara's attempts at psychological insight are clumsy and broad. Even his universally praised dialogue turns wooden the moment he attempts to grasp what lies beneath the social surface. But O'Hara remains one of America's greatest social novelists of the twentieth century, clearly surpassing his contemporary rivals, such as John P. Marquand and James Gould Cozzens. He captured one of the most far-reaching social transformations in American history.

Moreover, O'Hara was probably the most serious popular writer of his time. Even his severest critics refused to classify him as a hack. He was a meticulous writer and a relentless toiler who produced fourteen novels, six plays and a musical, 402 short stories, and a novella. Artistic greatness eluded him, but he consistently achieved high competence.

O'Hara was correct in his own assessment of his obsolescence; an unbridgeable gap seems to separate him from the novelists of our day. But that obsolescence tells us less about him than about our own cramped vision of literature. Albeit with mixed results, he indefatigably pursued Henry James's understanding of character: "We know a man imperfectly until we know his society, and we but half know a society until we know its manners."

Pottsville's neglect of O'Hara is poignant, considering his attachment to the place. He must have felt that "he owned the town, the town was his, because he possessed so many of the facts of its life," as he wrote of his character Claude Emerson—like O'Hara, a local reporter. Joan Didion has written, "A place belongs forever to whoever claims it hardest, remembers it most obsessively . . . loves it so radically that he remakes it in his image." Clearly, O'Hara's devotion to the Region constitutes a kind of love, however unromantic and unadmiring—but in that he claimed the place so much more fiercely than it claims him, it is a love unrequited.

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The Future Did Not Work

by J. Arch Getty

THE PASSING OF AN ILLUSION
The Idea of Communism in the Twentieth Century

by François Furet. Chicago, 596 pages, $35.00.

THE BLACK BOOK OF COMMUNISM
Crimes, Terror, Repression

by Stéphane Courtois, Nicolas Werth, Jean-Louis Panné, Andrzej Paczkowski, Karel Bartošek, and Jean-Louis Margolin. Harvard, 858 pages, $37.50.

ALONG with self-congratulation and relief, the fall of the Soviet Union has stimulated an abundance of post-mortems on communism and its place in the twentieth century. Though communism in its classic form may be extinct, we sometimes seem to be fighting it almost as fiercely today as we did when it threatened us.

Near the end of his life François Furet (1927–1997), one of the best historians of the French Revolution, turned his formidable intellect to the study of communism. In *The Passing of an Illusion: The Idea of Communism in the Twentieth Century*, his last book, Furet presents the Soviet experience as an illusion—one that retained a fascination and an allegiance in the West far beyond the time when its essence should have been clear. Furet, like many other French intellectuals embued with a leftist activism and an ideological passion dating from the French revolutions of 1789, 1848, and 1871, turned for a time to communism. He was a member of the French Communist Party from 1949 to 1956. Although his text is not in the first person, it provides an implicit chronicle of his own illusion, and disillusion.

It was an illusion on several counts. First, for Furet, communism was based on an ultimately false linear philosophical view of history as Reason, in which a superior phase of historical development—socialism—was scientifically bound to follow "bourgeois" (Furet's term) liberal capitalism. *The Passing of an Illusion* is brilliant, and one would be hard pressed to find better writing of history than the first chapter, which traces the roots of modern political thinking back to the nineteenth century. The liberal bourgeois quest for competitive individualism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries did not appeal to those who valued social and economic equality, or to those seeking a sense of community that transcended the isolation of the individual. The conflict between individual and collective rights still motivates politics today, and Furet believed that these limits to the bourgeois ideal would provide breeding grounds for fascism and communism, both of which had egalitarian and collectivist appeal.

Second, the geopolitical accident of its alliance with the Western democracies against Hitler created a wartime illusion of the Soviet Union as a democracy. The universal revulsion for the Nazis enabled the Communists for many years to enjoy a reputation for anti-fascism and thereby evade close scrutiny or objective evaluation by Western intellectuals, who yearned for social justice, were made uncomfortable by capitalist materialism, and felt moral outrage against fascism.

Furet is particularly eloquent about what he considers to be communism's ill-deserved image as fascism's opposite; he believes that the two were identical in every significant way. Both were born of the violence of the First World War, when millions of men, betrayed by their leaders, were embittered by the sacrifice forced upon them and angry at the war's pointlessness. Trench warfare brought the masses to the fore of European history, in a setting of violence, extremist passion, and anger. It was soldiers, Furet believed, who overthrew the Russian czar, eased Lenin's takeover, and made up the angry membership of fascist parties elsewhere. Fascism and communism were both mass movements (which Furet tends to dislike) that became one-man dictatorships.

Yet Furet may draw some criticism when he closely links Communist and fascist regimes. There is sharp debate about this today among historians, and many of them are uncomfortable putting communism and fascism into the same category. Clearly, both Hitler's and Stalin's regimes sought to exercise total control over their populations and deprive people of the possibility to organize or even exist outside the officially prescribed forms and institutions. Recent research shows, however, that much as they may have wanted to, the Stalinists were never able to build the coldly efficient machine of Orwell's *1984*; much of the Stalinist system worked as the Russian government had worked in 1884. Clumsy implementation of vague plans wreaked havoc with attempts to pursue policies. Moscow had little information about what was really happening in the far-flung provinces, where regional satraps used distance and poor communications to insulate themselves from Moscow's control and build their own power. There was not even a telephone line to the Soviet Far East until the eve of World War II. Research in newly available Soviet archives has also documented widespread Stalin-era dissent, passive and active resistance, strikes, and even full-scale peasant revolts of a kind and scale that Hitler never faced.

What's more, Nazi Germany and the USSR had radically different social and economic systems. Hitler, despite his populist rhetoric, largely preserved and defended private property, the market economy, and existing elites. Stalin utterly destroyed capitalism and physically annihilated the social and economic elites. Although both regimes used terror, they used it differently, against different targets. Hitler's terror was designed to be finite and to exterminate particular ethnic groups (Jews and Gypsies, for example). Stalin's terror mainly sought to turn social groups such as peasants and businessmen into a slave labor force that would be a permanent part of the Soviet economy. During the Cold War, when the USSR supplanted Nazi Germany as the enemy of the West, journalists and political scientists began to associate the two regimes. Furet could dig up only a few observers who tried to make an analogy between the two dictatorships before 1945.

LESS concerned with the subtleties of illusion, Stéphane Courtois and some of his co-authors are eager to associate Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia in a different way. *The Black Book of Communism*, an 800-page collection of essays about the human toll exacted by Communist regimes in the twentieth century, reaches a much simpler conclusion: the Germans and the Russians were merely terrible criminals who were members of a huge Communist gang. Examining the

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records of repression in the USSR, Eastern Europe, China, North Korea, Vietnam, Cambodia, Latin America, Africa, and Afghanistan, Courtois et al. arrive at a figure of 100 million deaths attributable to Communist regimes, as compared with 25 million attributable to the Nazis. In his essay Courtois makes the point that the Soviet terror was greater than the Nazis' and also, because it was systematic and genocidal, violated the Nuremberg Laws and the "unwritten code of the natural laws of humanity." The actions of Communist Parties thus qualify communism, like the Nazi Party, as a "criminal organization."

No sane person can rise to the defense of mass terror. The moral point has been clear for decades, although some may be troubled that Courtois relates the problem to ignoring the ideals of "Judeo-Christian civilization," which has no monopoly on morality. To frame our understanding of these events as numerical counts attributable to particular ideologies is even more problematic.

Courtois writes that he is not trying to present a "macabre comparative system for crunching numbers, some kind of grand total that doubles the horror." Yet there is a lot of arithmetic in his presentation, and one gets the impression that he is including every possible death just to run up the score. That impression troubled his distinguished co-authors; Nicolas Werth and Jean-Louis Margolin sparked a scandal in Paris when they publicly disassociated themselves from Courtois's opinions about the scale of Communist terror, asserting that his introduction was more a diatribe than a balanced scholarly treatment. They felt that he was obsessed with attributing a body count of 100 million to communism, and like several other scholars, they rejected his equation of Soviet repression with Nazi genocide. Werth, a well-regarded French specialist on the Soviet Union whose sections in the *Black Book* on the Soviet Communists are sober and damning, told *Le Monde*, "Death camps did not exist in the Soviet Union."

Stalin's camps were different from Hitler's. Tens of thousands of prisoners were released every year upon completion of their sentences. We now know that before World War II more inmates escaped annually from the Soviet camps than died there. Research shows that Stalin's camps and deportations, unlike their Nazi extermination counterparts, were planned components of the Soviet economy, designed to provide a stable slave-labor supply and to populate forbidding territories forcibly with involuntary settlers. Rations and medical care were substandard, but were often not dramatically better elsewhere in Stalin's Soviet Union and were not designed to hasten the inmates' deaths, although they certainly did so. Similarly, the overwhelming weight of opinion among scholars working in the new archives (including Courtois's co-editor Werth) is that the terrible famine of the 1930s was the result of Stalinist bungling and rigidity rather than some genocidal plan.

Are deaths from a famine caused by the stupidity and incompetence of the regime (such deaths account for more than half of Courtois's 100 million) to be equated with the deliberate gassing of Jews? Courtois's arithmetic is too simple. A huge number of the fatalities attributed here to Communist regimes fall into a kind of catchall category called "excess deaths": premature demises, over and above the expected mortality rate of the population, that resulted directly or indirectly from government policy. Those executed, exiled to Siberia, or forced into gulag camps where nutrition and living conditions were poor could fall into this category. But so could many others, and "excess deaths" are not the same as intentional deaths.

Such arithmetical history sacrifices historical accuracy by lumping different events into the same category. Jerry Hough, of Duke University, has suggested just how ambiguous such calculations can be. Using the dramatically rising death rates in Russia in the 1990s, and with perhaps a bit of tongue in cheek, Hough calculated that 1.5 million "extra deaths" occurred in Russia in just the first four years of Yeltsin's tenure—a total that, Hough points out, is "considerably larger than the number Stalin killed in the Great Purge" of the 1930s. The real problem with the books under review is a facile categorization in order to fix blame or make political points. It would be more polemical than accurate to equate famine deaths, victims of police terror, and deaths in Nazi gas chambers with the plight of Russians unable to buy food and health care today. One could place many of the century's deaths in any of several categories, according to the political point one wanted to make. Should we blame premature deaths in Russia today on the legacy of communism or on the failed policies of reformers? For how many deaths under Stalin should we blame communism? Stalin's personal paranoia? Backwardness or ignorance? We might do better to try to understand these grisly statistics in their contexts, rather than positing large polemical categories and then filling them up with bodies. Good history is about balanced interpretation and is usually more complicated than categorization or blame.

The Black Book attributes all these deaths to an ideology: Marxist-Leninist communism. Courtois's introduction and Martin Malia's foreword posit a single world Communist movement in the twentieth century within a "Leninist matrix" with a single "genetic code." Thus ideologies can be blamed for deaths, and all the terror in this case belongs to just one.

WAS there a single "communism" in this century? After Marx's First International association of Communists came three more Internationals. Each of them bitterly denounced its predecessors as the bearers of a false ideology. Regimes calling themselves Communist installed a bewildering variety of economic and social systems and constantly attacked one another for all kinds of ideological deviations; one party's Marxist-Leninist faith was another's vile heresy. They rarely acted as allies and frequently fought one another on the battlefield. The USSR and China fought steadily along the Amur River. Communist Vietnam invaded Communist Kampuchea, and then Communist China attacked Communist Vietnam.

Historically speaking, what did Stalin's disciplined, urban-based industrializing system have in common with Mao Zedong's reliance on the rural peasantry and the wild Cultural Revolution? Did the fanatical Mao and the pragmatic Deng Xiaoping share a genetic code? Pol Pot, who massacred his countrymen in Cambodia, had more in common with the anti-Communist Idi Amin than with the Communist Fidel Castro. The impulses and historical conditions giving rise to these regimes in various countries were vastly different. Even their terrors were dissimilar: Chinese and Vietnamese repression stressed re-education; the Khmer Rouge massacred categories of people; Stalin permanently transplanted real and imagined enemies. The only thing linking the Communist regimes was that each constantly attested that it was Marxist-Leninist—and that other Communist regimes were not. After all,

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Ethiopian colonels and Yemeni bandits used to claim that they were Leninists too, and nothing was easier than calling one's country a "people's republic."

If we want to categorize the unprecedented violence and terror of the past century, we could just as well use templates that have less to do with left-wing or right-wing isms. Backward countries driven to modernize quickly were (and are) often scenes of repression and sickening mass killing, whether they were self-proclaimed Communists or not. In addition to modernization, one could use religion, nationalism, economic competition, or the technology of war to group the century's deaths. If we want to play this scorecard game with isms, we could post a huge number of deaths to the account of capitalist and nationalist competition, starting with imperialism and two world wars and ending with excess deaths in Yeltsin's democratic Russia.

The Passing of an Illusion can be seen as a testament to the Western intellectual view of communism, and it might seem unfair to criticize Furet for the weakness of his coverage of Russian history. But in presenting the Western view Furet feels obliged to provide a good bit of that history. In the process he rejects several decades of historical research on the Soviet Union—as does Courtois—and insists on views that were current decades ago. These days the weight of historical and archival evidence is against both authors: they depict the 1917 October Revolution as a mere coup rather than the social upheaval that historians study today. To them the famine of 1932–1933 was simply a planned Ukrainian genocide, although today most see it as a policy blunder that affected millions belonging to other nationalities. Yes, at the end of World War II, Stalin incarcerated returning Soviet prisoners of war, but now we know that most of them were released quickly after routine processing in temporary camps.

Furet writes that the "beginning of the end" for the Soviet regime was Nikita Khrushchev's anti-Stalin secret speech of 1956, which "overturned the universal status of the Communist idea." For Furet and other intellectuals, this was truly a crack in the ideological façade of the Soviet Union (Furet himself broke with communism that year), and the rest of Soviet history resolves itself into steady decomposition. Ideas matter intensely for Furet, and from the limited point of view of ideology he is right. The break with Stalinism did in fact disorient and begin to disillusion Western Communist intellectuals. French former Communists often date their own defection and the beginning of the end of the Soviet Union together, and argue about who left the Party at the most correct time, thus confounding Soviet history with their own. Furet's view ignores the fact that the USSR existed for another thirty-five years after 1956—more years than Stalin ruled. Economically and technologically these were actually among the best years for the long-suffering Soviet people.

Similarly, Furet's book in particular proposes an old-fashioned kind of personalized history that encompasses not only the play of ideas but also the deeds of famous people. Absent here is any real consideration of society or economics or the roles of masses of people, except as categories manipulated by leading personalities. Perhaps because of his lack of expertise in modern history, Furet has written a kind of nineteenth-century version of great men making history. I doubt that many modern historians would agree that Lenin, Hitler, and Mussolini "took power by breaking weak regimes with the superior force of their wills." Surely more than that was involved.

Yes, French intellectuals were disappointed by the Soviet Union. But many others were not, and not everyone is concerned solely with ideas, ideologies, and great men. It is instructive to remember that only nine months before Yeltsin dissolved the USSR, an overwhelming majority of Soviet voters, in a referendum, were in favor of maintaining the union. For a surprising number of people today in the former Soviet Union, the terror does not wholly negate achievements such as universal literacy, one of the best technological-education systems in the world, the first man in space, free education and health care, and security in old age. Maybe these social gains, too, were an illusion, but we risk another kind of illusion by not including the few but important pluses with the mountains of minuses. The West need not be generous in its victory over communism, but we might be more balanced in our obituaries.

Furet sees communism as a kind of flash in the pan of modern history. When the illusion passed, he writes, it left virtually no traces and no enduring lega-

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cy. This is preposterous. Admittedly, besides its moral failure, communism failed in its crusade to convert the whole world and in the end succeeded in lastingly converting no significant part of it. But communism's impact was and still is enormous. In addition to provoking significant changes in capitalist economies, such as vastly increased military spending and the growth of a military-industrial complex, the USSR's existence changed Western social development in fundamental ways.

Labor reform in the West in the past century came about under the threat of a radicalized international labor movement protected and supported by the USSR. President Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal was in part meant to steal the thunder of radicals who looked to Moscow and therefore could not be ignored. Social goals that are commonplace today, including women's rights and racial integration, were planks of the Communist Party platform long before mainstream American parties took them seriously. It was Communists who first went to the American South and began organizing African-Americans and poor whites around issues of social justice. The more politically acceptable young people who followed them in the sixties are heroes today. On the international scene the Soviet Union provided support for Nelson Mandela and other reformers. Communism made life difficult for Western establishments, and it is doubtful that reforms would have come when they did if the USSR had not existed. Communists always rejected reform in favor of revolution. Ironically, however, the existence of the Soviet Union helped the capitalist West reform itself and avoid the bloody revolutions of the East. Twentieth-century communism was no passing illusion; its legacies are everywhere.

Why are we seeing books like these now, when communism is gone and there are no more dragons to slay? Their authors tell us that there have been no "probing examinations" of Communist horrors, and that communism has to date received no "fair and just" assessment. This comes as a surprise, given that the field of Soviet studies in the West before the late 1970s did little more than detail Soviet crimes. Most writing about the Soviet Union then was about totalitarian terror, and Soviet specialists provided us with a full menu of Communist atrocities. One could read about these horrors in Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's masterly *Gulag Archipelago* decades ago. And it has been seven years since I and others published the actual figures on Soviet gulag inmates and executions from the KGB archives of the notorious gulag system. From 1921 to Stalin's death, in 1953, around 800,000 people were sentenced to death and shot, 85 percent of them in the years of the Great Terror of 1937–1938. From 1934 to Stalin's death, more than a million perished in the gulag camps. A few years ago these figures were confirmed by KGB archivists and published in the Yeltsin Administration's official gazetteer. No, the books under review are not responses to any failure to study these questions. A more cogent justification for these works lies in their presentation of factual material from newly available archives. In particular, Werth's chapters on the Soviet Union provide a wealth of historical details. It is unfortunate that they are presented more as polemic than as balanced, carefully analyzed history.

Such books, which use obsolete concepts to tell part of a story, are less about history than about politics. French tradition does not favor objective history for history's sake. Every history book in France is immediately understood as its author's political declaration. Because the French Communist Party is still a force in politics, historical books about communism inevitably become today's polemics. Courtois himself has said, "In France, history is politics." But Furet's erudition and the Courtois team's 800 pages of single-minded fine print are unlikely to produce a similar impact in the United States, where much more has been known of Soviet crimes and where the Communist Party has never been part of the respectable intellectual establishment. ❦

BRIEF REVIEWS

The Vision of Emma Blau

by Ursula Hegi.
Simon & Schuster, 432 pages, $25.00.

Ms. Hegi's novel follows three generations of a family and its property. Stefan Blau, aged thirteen, ran away from a small German town in 1894, reached the United States, and wound up as the proprietor of an elegant restaurant and the Wasserburg, a large, equally elegant apartment house improbably situated on the shore of Lake Winnipesaukee, in New Hampshire. This required hard work and shrewd attention to finances. His German-American family—one child by each of three wives—remained bicultural while splitting in various directions. Their affairs converge in a row over ownership of the now decaying Wasserburg. Ms. Hegi provides a large cast of convincing Blaus, tenants, relatives back in Germany, and Winnipesaukee locals. The story covers nearly a century of history, most of which the Blaus deplore. Ms. Hegi has a canny eye for the lingering effects of a German background on manners, furniture, and food, and also for the subtle resentments created by the family's cross-cultural heritage. This is a novel of wide range, richly interesting in both character and episode.

Disgrace

by J. M. Coetzee.
Viking, 220 pages, $23.95.

The protagonist of Mr. Coetzee's admirable novel is David Lurie, a professor of romantic poetry who, in his fifties and twice divorced, finds his lifelong habit of one-night stands difficult to maintain. He engages in something resembling a real love affair with a student, and is asked to resign. He retreats to his daughter's small farm, in a district where the lawlessness of the new South Africa flourishes—and strikes savagely. The novel develops into a debate between generations. Lurie clings to standards of law and order and

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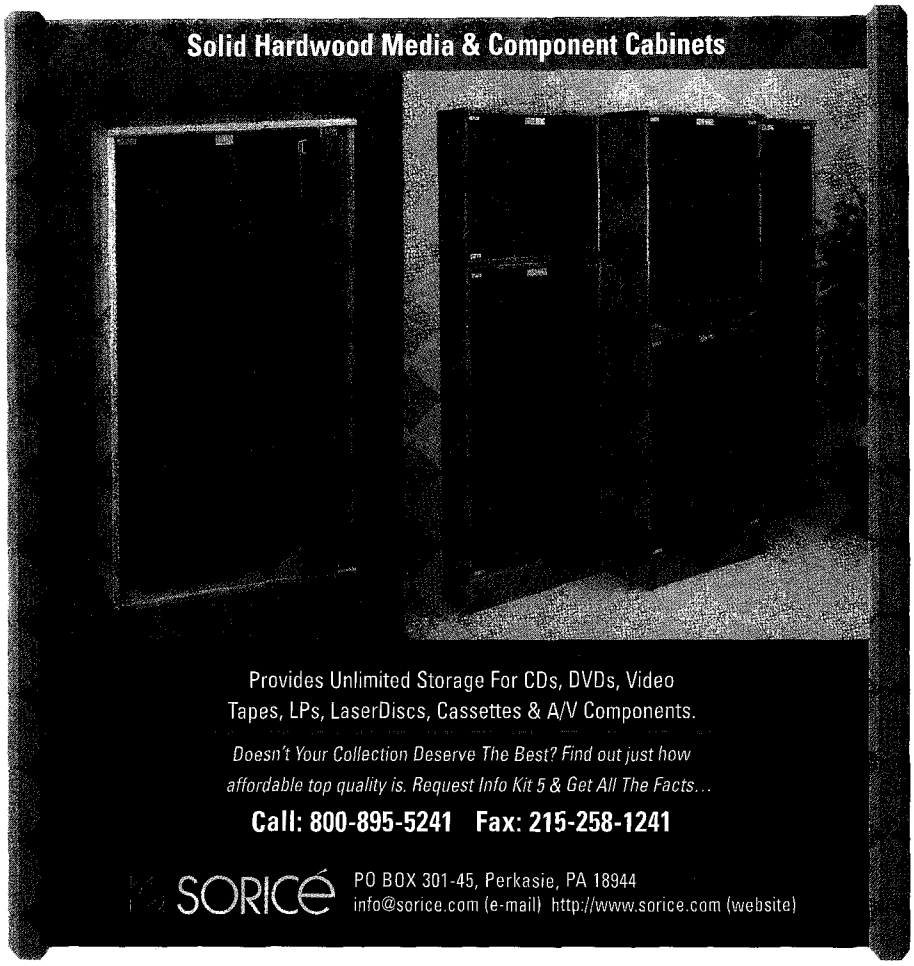
courteous distance between black and white. His daughter is prepared to accept total integration as the only way to survive in the country she loves. There is no way to reconcile these positions, and the novel ends in ambiguity, but on the way it offers high excitement in a raid on the farm, and tart satire in a scene in which the academic ethics committee attempts to extract groveling repentance on top of Lurie's honest admission of guilt.

M: The Man Who Became Caravaggio

by Peter Robb.
Holt/John Macrae, 560 pages,
$32.50.

The painter Caravaggio had a family name that was spelled in too many ways for anyone to keep track of. He became known by the name of his parents' town, near Milan. His given name was Michelangelo (more or less), and his biographer saves space by referring to him as M. That is the only space-saving gesture in this splendidly spacious, grandly inclusive life of the man who can justly be considered the founder of the baroque style. M was tremendously successful in his lifetime, and widely imitated. After his death, in 1610, he was soon ignored, and little was known about him for a couple of centuries. According to Mr. Robb, information has recently begun to surface because scholars have realized that facts about M are to be found not in records about art but in the records of the police. When he was not painting, M frequented taverns and tennis courts, "looking for fights or arguments." The Rome in which M worked was in a fury of rebuilding and redecorating. It was full of ambitious artists and was also at the height of Counter-Reformation fervor. The time, Robb writes, was one "of bureaucratic power, thought police and fearful conformism, in which arselickers and time-servers flourished and original minds were ferociously punished or condemned to silence." M had an original mind and an original style. Repression may have contributed to his bad temper. The Vatican had issued rules for the painting of religious subjects—and the Church was the source of the big commissions. There were to be no undignified poses, no nudity, and no display of any creature's bare bottom. M got away with an eye-catching horse's rump, but had to redo a Saint Matthew



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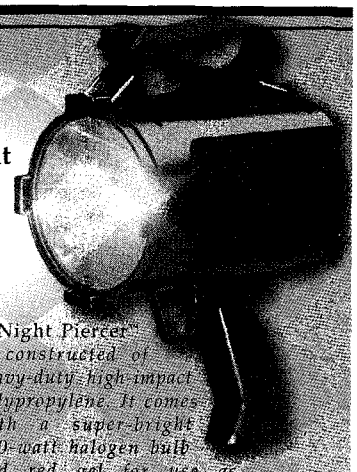

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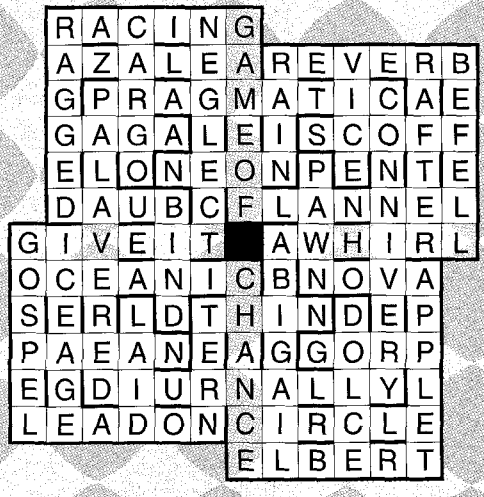
ANSWERS TO THE FEBRUARY PUZZLER



"Your Turn"

Clues. 1.a. GO + SPEL(l) b. ELBERT (rev.) c. BE(FE)LL d. R(A + C)ING 2.a. AZ + (A)LEA b. I + C(E)AGE c. RAFTER (double def.) d. CIRC(L)E 3.a. PAL(A + V)E RED b. PRAGMATIC (anag.) c. D(I + URN)ALLY d. CONN(IV)ERY 4.a. G(OR)P b. VI(C)E c. L(A)ID d. GAG + A 5.a. FLA(N)NEL (*fallen* anag.) b. N + E(G)LECT c. OCEANIC (anag.) d. A + BIG + AIL 6.a. RAGGED (double def.) b. LEA(DO)N c. APPLE + T d. R(EVER)B 7.a. DOL(C)E b. PAEAN (anag.) c. SC + OF + F d. C + ARGO 8.a. NEON (hidden) b. BIN + D c. PAWN (double def.) d. THIN(g) 9.a. RAIN (homophone) b. N + OVA c. D(A)UB d. TERN (homophone)

with dirty feet. M's belligerence eventually put him on the run from a murder conviction. He dodged to Naples, Malta, Sicily, and back to Naples. He was welcomed in all these places, and painted busily, but there were also physical attacks. Somebody was after him, and when he tried to return to Rome, somebody got him. He was thirty-nine. His body was never found, and contemporary accounts of his disappearance are wildly implausible. Mr. Robb has a theory on what happened to M, and it is reasonable but unprovable, like much else concerning the man. In lieu of personal detail, Mr. Robb provides a constantly fascinating description of M's Rome. There were juvenile cardinals, "cardinals' nephews," sons of great houses (who had money, high status, and nothing to do but amuse themselves), and the hangers-on whom they naturally attracted. The city was infested with spies, informers, scandalmongers, and scandals. There were party and personal vendettas. There were unemployed soldiers at large whenever peace broke out. It was a gaudy, treacherous, greedy world, which Mr. Robb details with enthusiasm. Readers with a taste for antique melodrama will enjoy it. Art lovers will appreciate Mr. Robb's aesthetic judgment and his ability to describe what is really in a painting. Everyone can take pleasure in his prose, which is fast-moving, colloquial, and unique in the art-book genre.

Colors of the Mountain

by Da Chen.
Random House, 320 pages,
$25.00.

Mr. Chen describes growing up in Mao's China as a son of the abominated landlord class. Any member of his family could be stoned by street urchins and persecuted by minor officials. There was much petty spite, some kindness, and a great deal of the sort of corruption endemic to inefficient economies. Conditions improved with Mao's death. Mr. Chen got to college, although he had been denied entrance to high school on the grounds that his well-educated parents could not possibly have produced a worthy Communist citizen. The memoir is by no means entirely grim. Young Da and his friends managed to be quite merry, and some episodes are downright funny.

—Phoebe-Lou Adams

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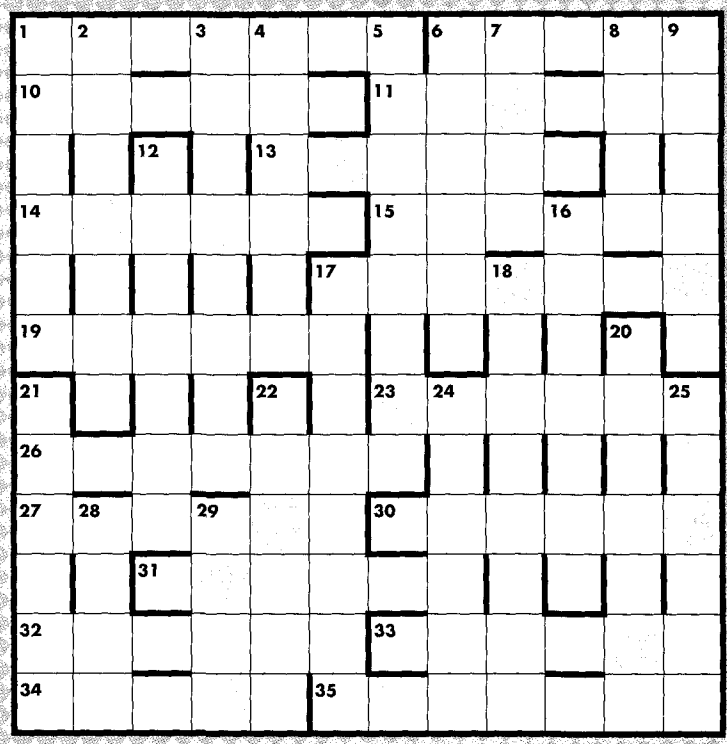
THE PUZZLER

by Emily Cox and Henry Rathvon

Bright Prospects

The omission of answer lengths from this puzzle's clues may seem a gloomy business, but a consolation is spelled out in the shaded circles, reading left to right and top to bottom. This phrase may help you reconcile 14 clue answers with their places in the diagram. Answers include four proper nouns and a less-than-common word at 2 Down; new diagram entries include one proper noun and one two-word phrase.



The solution to last month's Puzzler appears on page 118.

Across

1. Member of a fraternity that was screened in and out
6. Making a 180° turn very recently, finished at the front
10. Domestic work with a blade, about medium
11. Holder of second in contest
13. Heard the main musician's songs
14. Gold coin for wearing around start of Lent
15. Put up with spike-carrying revolutionary
17. Tray for serving refreshments, mostly to assuage
19. Facing the wrong way, a kind of pastry's layers
23. John Brown's back with somebody who's gone around the bend
26. Ministers to tackle limits
27. Continue to improve current TV drama in return
30. Swindle is gripping to actor in *Becket*
31. Interest in crosses and arms of the sea
32. Brownish hue I found in yellow flower
33. Confess about couple of errors in dating
34. Guy without a pen
35. Rather old idiot in gym class

Down

1. Restaurants invaded by hundred bugs
2. Greek soldier landed in Arkansas town
3. Horror film of the 1970s not fully kept in stock
4. *Shining* is a bit of goofy fluff
5. Miles put into old Bean's work clothes
6. Idly, we shifted across a lot of territory
7. Lost a note, according to the audience
8. Onset of guitars in rock is something frightful
9. Born of French, with Dutch required
12. Low note for an actress in *Ordinary People*
16. Skunks in circle surrounded by tracks
17. Bunker is also in band (*two words*)
18. "Victory" sign goes through changes
20. One in *Bye-Bye* is performing an aria, perhaps
21. Force small lock
22. In performance, "I Love New York" is rather smelly
24. In a Midwestern town, our group is entertaining
25. "Zip," sister said
28. Upcoming magazine to put into circulation
29. Noise before great sound of a chime

Note: The instructions above are for this month's puzzle only. It is assumed that you know how to decipher clues. For a complete introduction to clue-solving, send an addressed, stamped long envelope to The Atlantic Puzzler, 77 North Washington Street, Boston, Mass. 02114.

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WORD IMPROVISATION

by J. E. Lighter

Wising Up

LAST fall Richard Brookhiser published an article in *American Heritage* called "How Smart Should a President Be?" Not long after, pundits and spin doctors were focusing on the intellect—or perceived lack thereof—of leading candidates. None of the front-runners, apparently, is ideal. George W. Bush has been labeled an *empty suit* by opponents and is regarded by some critics as *no rocket scientist*; both phrases are left over from the 1980s. Bill Bradley, however, is charged with being too "cerebral": a tedious *poindexter*, instead of a snappy *smart cookie* or a clever *smart apple*. And Al Gore has long been called a *policy wonk*, which may be good or bad, depending on your sense of executive priorities.

Poindexter, applied to students who are too smart to be popular, has been a schooltime favorite since the mid-1980s. It's got nothing to do with Rear Admiral John M. Poindexter, President Ronald Reagan's national-security adviser: *Poindexter* is both a brainy junior scientist in the *Felix the Cat* cartoon and a maladroit student in the film *Revenge of the Nerds* (1984). Related to the *poindexter* is the *brainiac*, originally Superman's green-skinned alien foe, who first appeared in 1958; the word neatly combines *brainy* and *maniac* (standard mad-scientist adjectives) with overtones of Eckert and Mauchly's *Univac*, a much-publicized computer of the era. But whence comes this *wonk*?

A good question. Britain's Royal Navy had its *wonks* in the 1920s: "new cadets or new midshipmen of questionable ability." (A possible etymology, the adjective *wonky*, meaning "tipsy, unsteady, unsound," carries nuances that haven't been fully Americanized.) Following a few intermediate unflattering turns, by the 1960s *wonk* was the word at Harvard for the kind of people that the late Alabama Governor George Wallace eventually decried as "pointy-headed intellectuals." The typical *policy wonk* lives for policy issues likely to induce drowsiness in others.

Investigations of slang
by the editor of the
Random House Historical Dictionary of American Slang

Norman Mailer alluded to John Kennedy's "hard Irish *smarts*" in 1967; that economical word for "intelligence or sharpness of wits" soon swept the field. Earlier slangsters relied on terms such as *savvy* and *gray matter* to refer to the elusive quality often called IQ. Any anatomist can tell you that *gray matter* perfectly describes the brownish-gray tissue of the brain and spinal cord; the phrase had entered the medical vocabulary by 1840 and, with the rise of public awareness of what a working brain looks like, had taken on the less formal, metaphorical sense of "intellect or intelligence" by 1899.

A noun, a verb, and an adjective, *savvy* is seemingly indispensable to business and communications journalism, from which it has been propelled into standard American English. *Savvy* is broader than *smarts*, shrewder than *know-how*. It probably came into English from the Spanish *saber*, "to know," and often used to appear in stories of the West in the form *¡no sabe!*, which sounds like *no savvy* to the monolingual English-speaker. In English *no savvy* means "I/he/she/it/they don't/doesn't know/understand!" *Savvy* first turned up in the late eighteenth century, but the spelling with a "v" got a boost in the 1870s from Bret Harte, the popular author of "The Luck of Roaring Camp" and dozens of other California tales.

Interest in the contents of politicians' *noggins* (long ago the word referred to a kind of drinking mug) is hardly new; the electorate has always liked candidates who *use the old bean* without being too obvious about it. Adlai Stevenson was considered an *egghead* in his 1952 race with Dwight Eisenhower—a dubious distinction that didn't help him that November. LBJ's claim that Gerald Ford wasn't smart enough to "*chew gum and walk at the same time*" is now secure in the treasury of political invective. But of course, as David Hess, a state representative in New Hampshire, observed recently, when it comes to politics "people are suspicious of the four-point-O, straight-A guy." Hess may be right; maybe a *rocket scientist* can figure out why.

Illustration by Marc Rosenthal

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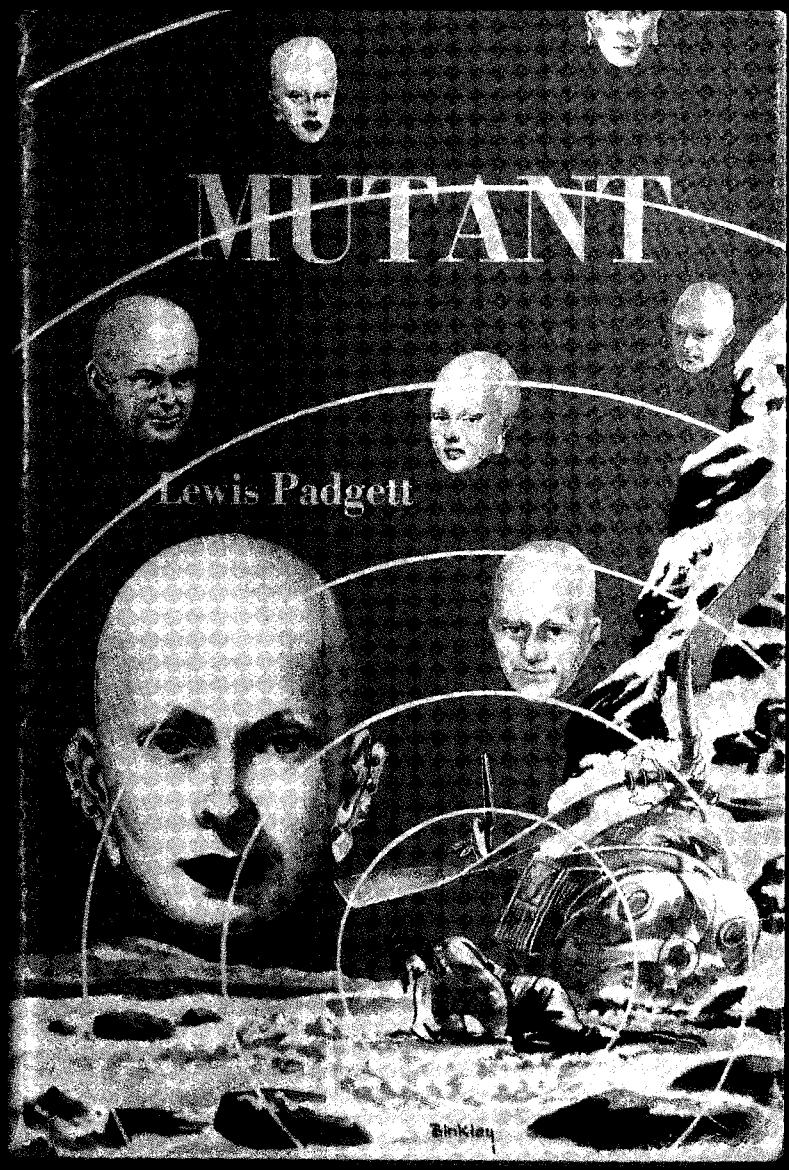
April 11, 1977. Freaked you out so bad you had to bury it.



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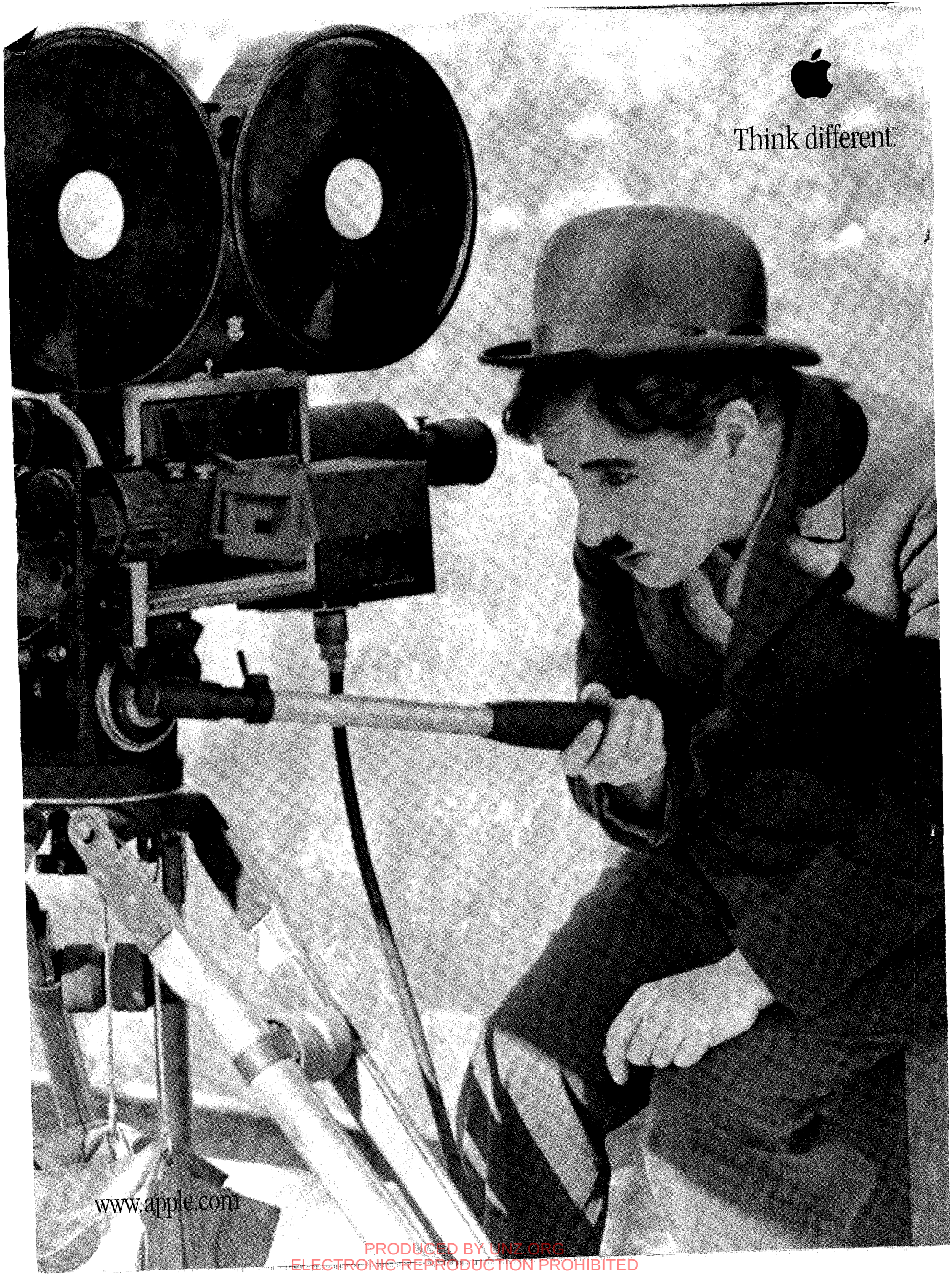

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